CLASSICAL THEISM

NEW ESSAYS ON THE METAPHYSICS OF GOD

Edited by
Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons

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This volume provides a contemporary account of classical theism. It features 17 original essays from leading scholars that advance the discussion of classical theism in new and interesting directions.

It's safe to say that classical theism—the view that God is simple, omniscient, and the greatest possible being—is no longer the assumed view in the analytic philosophy of religion. It is often dismissed as being rooted in outdated metaphysical systems of the sort advanced by ancient and medieval philosophers. The main purpose of this volume is twofold: to provide a contemporary account of what classical theism is and to advance the scholarly discussion about classical theism. In Section I, the contributors offer a clear and cutting-edge account of the nature and existence of God and the historical and theological foundations of classical theism. Section II contains chapters on a variety of topics, such as whether classical theism's doctrine of simplicity needs revision, whether simplicity is compatible with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, and whether the hypothesis of a multiplicity of divine ideas is consistent with divine simplicity, among others.

Classical Theism will appeal to scholars and advanced students in the philosophy of religion who are interested in the nature of God.

Jonathan Fuqua is an assistant professor of philosophy at Conception Seminary College, USA. He specializes in the philosophy of religion, ethics, and epistemology. He is the co-editor of *Faith and Reason* (2019) and *The Cambridge Handbook to Religious Epistemology* (forthcoming). His articles have appeared in such places as the *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion, American Philosophical Quarterly, Synthese*, and *Philosophia*.

Robert C. Koons is a professor of philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, USA. He specializes in logic, metaphysics, and the philosophy of religion. He is the author of *Paradoxes of Belief and Strategic Rationality* (1992) and *Realism Regained* (2000), co-author of *Metaphysics: The Fundamentals* (2015) and *The Atlas of Reality* (2017), and the co-editor of *The Waning of Materialism* (2010) and *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives on the Philosophy of Science* (Routledge, 2017).

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Contributors

Edward Feser is Professor of Philosophy at Pasadena City College in Pasadena, California. He is the author of many academic articles and books, including *Aquinas* (2009), *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (2014), and *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (2017).

Robert C. Koons is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, USA. He specializes in logic, metaphysics, and the philosophy of religion. He is the author of over 80 articles, and of *Paradoxes of Belief and Strategic Rationality* (1992) and *Realism Regained* (2000), co-author of *Metaphysics: The Fundamentals* (2015) and *The Atlas of Reality* (2017), and the co-editor of *The Waning of Materialism* (2010), *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives on Contemporary Science* (Routledge, 2017), and *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics and the Theology of Nature* (Routledge, 2021).

Alexander R. Pruss is Pofessor of Philosophy at Baylor University. He has published several books, including *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (2006), *Actuality, Possibility and Worlds* (2011), and *Infinity, Causation, and Paradox* (2018), and over a 100 articles and chapters in philosophy and mathematics. His current research focuses on metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of mathematics, and formal epistemology.

Gyula Klima is a Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, New York, Director of the *Research Center for the History of Ideas* of the *Institute of Hungarian Research*, Budapest, Hungary, and a Doctor of the *Hungarian Academy of Sciences*. He is the Founding Director of the *Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics* and of the *Society for the European History of Ideas* and Editor of their *Proceedings*. His publications, besides more than 100 scholarly papers, include *Questions on Aristotle's* De Anima *by John Buridan* (2022), *Questions on the Soul by John Buridan and Others: A Companion to John Buridan's Philosophy of Mind* (2017), *Intentionality,*

Cognition and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy (2015), *John Buridan* (2008), John Buridan: *Summulae de Dialectica*, *an annotated translation with a philosophical introduction*; (2001); *ARS ARTIUM: Essays in Philosophical Semantics, Medieval and Modern* (1988).

Katherin A. (Kate) Rogers is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Delaware, USA. Her areas of specialization are Medieval Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, and Free Will. She has published numerous articles. Her books include *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford, 2008), *Freedom and Self-Creation: Anselmian Libertarianism* (2015), and *The Experimental Approach to Free Will: Freedom in the Laboratory* (Routledge, 2022).

Daniel De Haan is a Research Fellow of the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford. He is the principal investigator for the "Conceptual Clarity Concerning Human Nature" project funded by the Templeton World Charity Foundation. Before coming to Oxford, De Haan was a postdoctoral fellow in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge working on the neuroscience strand of the Templeton World Charity Foundation Fellowships in Theology, Philosophy of Religion, and the Sciences Project. He is the author of several articles and book chapters, as well as the book, *Necessary Existence and the Doctrine of Being in Avicenna's Metaphysics of the Healing* (2020).

Timothy O'Connor is the Mahlon Powell Professor of Philosophy and a member of the Cognitive Sciences Program at Indiana University. He specializes in metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of religion. He is the author of over 70 scholarly articles and of *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will* (2000) and *Theism and Ultimate Explanation* (2008). He has also edited or co-edited five books on the philosophy of mind and action and a sixth on the epistemology of religious belief.

Jamie B. Turner is a research fellow in the Department of Philosophy at Ibn Haldun University, Turkey, and a PhD candidate in philosophy at the University of Birmingham, UK. His primary research areas are in philosophy of religion, epistemology, and Islamic theology. He is the author of a number of scholarly articles and book chapters, which include: "An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology" *Philosophy East and West* (2021), and "Ibn Taymiyya on theistic signs and knowledge of God" *Religious Studies* (2022).

Enis Doko is an associate professor of Philosophy at Ibn Haldun University, İstanbul, Turkey. He specializes in the Philosophy of

Physics, Science, and Religion from the Islamic perspective, Islamic Theology (Kalam), and Philosophy of Religion. He has seven books, all in Turkish, including the first Turkish textbook on analytic metaphysics.

Samuel Lebens is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Haifa, Israel. He works on a range of topics in epistemology, metaphysics, the philosophy of language, and the philosophy of religion. He is the author of numerous articles in journals such as *Philosophical Studies*, *Philosopher's Imprint, Religious Studies,* and *Synthese.* He is also the author of *Bertrand Russell and the Nature of Propositions* (Routledge, 2017), *The Principles of Judaism* (2020), and *Philosophy of Religion: The Basics* (Routledge, 2022). He co-edited *Jewish Philosophy in an Analytic Age* (2019).

Tyler Dalton McNabb is an associate professor of philosophy at Saint Francis University. He specializes in the philosophy of religion and epistemology. He has authored/co-authored over 20 papers featured in journals such as *Religious Studies*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, and *Religions*. McNabb has also authored/co-authored books with Cambridge University Press, Bloomsbury, and Lexington Books.

Erik Baldwin (PhD, Purdue University) is an adjunct professor of Philosophy at Indiana University, Northwest. His work focuses on the philosophy of religion, epistemology, and comparative and cross-cultural philosophy, with an emphasis on Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic philosophy. He is the author of *Fully Informed Reasonable Disagreement and Tradition-Based Perspectivalism* (2016). He is co-author (with Tyler McNabb) of *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions: Prospects and Problems* (2018) and *Classical Theism and Buddhism: Connecting Metaphysical and Ethical Systems* (2022). He has published papers in journals such as the *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, *Open Theology*, *Philosophia Christi*, and *Religious Studies*.

Gregory T. Doolan is an associate professor in the School of Philosophy at the Catholic University of America. He specializes in medieval philosophy, metaphysics, and the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Doolan is the author of *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (2008) and editor of the volume *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations* (2011). His articles have appeared in such journals as *International Philosophical Quarterly, Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale,* and *The Thomist.*

Christopher M. Tomaszewski is an assistant professor of philosophy at Belmont Abbey College, where he teaches philosophy and great books.

He holds a PhD in philosophy from Baylor University and a BS in mathematics from Villanova University. His primary research interests include metaphysics, mediæval philosophy, logic, and philosophy of religion (especially Thomistic solutions to contemporary problems in analytic philosophy), and more specifically in philosophical anthropology, classical theism, mereology, and causation. He is the author of several articles in *Analysis*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, and other journals. He lives in Stanley, NC, with his wife Haley and their dog Borromeo.

Michael J. Dodds, OP, is a Professor of Philosophy and Theology at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA, USA. He specializes in the philosophy of nature, philosophical anthropology, divine action, and the existence and attributes of God. He is the author of *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability* (2008), *Unlocking Divine Action: Contemporary Science and Thomas Aquinas* (2012), and *The One Creator God in Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology* (2020).

Mark K. Spencer is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of St. Thomas, MN, associate editor for *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, and a Fellow for Aesthetics and Metaphysics at the Hildebrand Project. He specializes in metaphysics, philosophy of religion, and philosophical anthropology. He is the author of numerous articles and book chapters and the recent book, *The Irreducibility of the Human Person: A Catholic Synthesis* (2022).

Timothy J. Pawl is Professor of Philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN. He specializes in analytic theology, metaphysics, Thomistic philosophy, and moral psychology. He is the author of over 40 articles and of *In Defense of Conciliar Christology* (2016), *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology* (2019), and *The Incarnation* (2020).

Fr. James Dominic Rooney, OP, is an assistant professor at Hong Kong Baptist University, and a fellow of the Thomistic Institute (Rome) and of the Centre for Sino-Christian Studies (HKBU). He specializes in metaphysics, medieval philosophy, Chinese philosophy, and philosophy of religion. He is the author of a number of scholarly articles and of *Material Objects in Confucian and Aristotelian Metaphysics* (2022), as well as co-editor (with Patrick Zoll, SJ) of the forthcoming *Beyond Classical Liberalism: Freedom and the Good* (Routledge).

Introduction

Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons

This is a book about classical theism. Theism is of course the thesis that God exists, but what does the modifier *classical* add? There is a family of conceptions of God, drawing largely from Platonic and Aristotelian sources and quite prominent among Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophers and theologians in the Middle Ages. This conception is largely negative in content, emphasizing the ways in which God is different from all created things. In particular, this tradition asserts that God is uncaused, independent, immaterial, simple (not composed of parts), beginningless, timeless or atemporal, impassive (not subject to being affected intrinsically), and immutable (lacking any potentiality for internal change). In its most extreme form (as represented by Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas) it claims that God is identical to His own nature, and that this nature and God are identical to God's existence. The process theologian Charles Hartshorne (1984, p. ix) applied the term 'classical theism' to this tradition in the 20th century.

This conception of God has always been somewhat controversial among adherents of the Abrahamic religions, although it had almost certainly become the dominant view among Christian theologians in the High Middle Ages. It is fair to say that it has become much more controversial in the last century, being challenged by process theologians and by defenders of theistic personalism or "neo-classical" theism, including Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, Peter van Inwagen, and Alvin Plantinga, as well as by open theists and process theologians. At the same time, classical theism has also drawn many prominent defenders in recent years. Given the rise of non-classical versions of theism in recent philosophy and theology, it seems fitting to produce a volume on classical theism: what it is; its various versions; what can be said for it and, in some cases, against it; how it looks from within various theological perspectives; and why it matters. This volume is just such a volume: we here present seventeen essays by leading scholars of classical theism, at various stages of their career, on the contours, merits, and demerits of various versions of classical theism. As an updated presentation, exposition, argument for, and criticism of classical theism and

its various versions, it fills a serious lacuna in the recent literature on the nature and existence of God, most of which focuses on arguments for God's existence, criticisms of classical theism, defenses of non-classical theism, and isolated defenses of one or two elements of classical theism, such as divine foreknowledge or divine timelessness.

As this volume will make clear, the tradition of classical theism is not a uniform or homogeneous one. Many contributors defend a strictly Thomist conception of divine simplicity (Feser, Koons, De Haan, Tomaszewski, Dodds, and Dolezal), but others offer less extreme versions, including Anselmian (Rogers) or Scotistic (O'Connor) models. Timothy O'Connor considers four options, a strict Thomistic one, Duns Scotus's inseparability thesis (which requires only that God's existence and His intrinsic attributes be inseparable, rather than identical), Eleonore Stump's theory (which limits God's contingent intrinsic properties to those constituting His free activity, while retaining the thesis that God cannot be acted upon), and his own, relatively modest account, which permits God to have contingent intrinsic properties caused by the free choices of God's creatures, so long as those creatures and their choices are wholly dependent on God for their existence. Katherin Rogers builds on Anselm's perfect being theology, emphasizing God's eternity or "isotemporality," while admitting that God's internal state can be counterfactually dependent on the free and contingent choices of creatures. Gyuala Klima's chapter includes the perspective of both Augustine and some later scholastic thinkers (including Scotus and Ockham) on the questions of how we can refer to God, what we can mean by "being God," and the relationship between the conceptual and real orders. James Rooney argues for the compatibility of classical theism with the account of divine essence and energies propounded by the Eastern Orthodox theologian Gregory Palamas.

Classical theism is by no means limited to the field of Christian theology. It has roots in the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neo-Platonic traditions and has gained thereby a foothold in Jewish and Islamic thought, as the chapters by Samuel Lebens and by Enis Doko and Jamie Turner exemplify. Tyler McNabb and Erik Baldwin make a strong case for the value of classical theism in developing inter-religious dialogue with religious traditions from the south and east Asia, including Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, and Advaita Vedānta traditions.

The most central question, of course, is that of truth. What reason do we have to accept that any version of classical theism is true? Our authors offer a wide range of answers to this question. First, there is the authority of particular traditions. Edward Feser and Christopher Tomaszewski cite both Scriptural and patristic support for divine simplicity and immutability, and Feser points also to conciliar statements by Lateran IV and Vatican I. In the Jewish tradition, the authority of Moses Maimonides was considerable, as Samuel Lebens indicates. Lebens also cites support from the Torah, and Saadya Gaon and Hasdai Crescas

provided non-Aristotelian arguments for divine simplicity. Lebens draws a distinction between the strong doctrine of simplicity advocated by Maimonides and the more modest version defended by Crescas. Lebens concludes by developing a form of idealism, drawing on Kabalistic and Hasidic sources, arguing that Jews ought to embrace a modest version of divine simplicity and atemporality as applied to the transcendent "face" of God. Enis Doko and Jamie Turner trace the development of divine simplicity and impassibility from the Quran and scriptural theology to the early scholastic Mu'tazilite school to ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) within the *falsafa* tradition.

The second reason for embracing classical theism is purely philosophical. Rob Koons and Daniel DeHaan develop in some detail some Aristotelian and Thomistic arguments for the tenets of classical theism, working from the thesis that God is the uncaused cause of everything else. Koons relies on new versions of three Thomistic arguments: the First and Second Ways, and the argument in *De Ente et Essentia* from creaturely essences and existence. Koons takes the arguments to presuppose an Aristotelian account of change and Thomas's novel account of actuality in terms of acts of existence. Koons argues that absolute simplicity, including God's identity with His own act of existence, follows from the conclusions of these arguments. He sketches how God's perfection and intelligence can be seen as further corollaries. Daniel De Haan focuses on the "triplex" character of Thomas's overall approach to natural theology: the way of causation, the way of negation, and the way of super-eminence. He develops and defends the Bergmann-Brower truthmaker account of divine simplicity. The triplex method explains why existence, perfection, and simplicity are the fundamental attributes of God, from which the other divine characteristics follow. Rogers, Lebens, and O'Connor also consider this Thomistic strategy and find it wanting. Katherin Rogers defends an alternative philosophical route, that of Anselm's perfect being theology, a route criticized in turn by De Haan.

Finally, there are reasons that might be described as religious but not traditional, including appeals to religious experience or the nature of religious attitudes like worship. Alex Pruss offers twelve arguments in favor of classical theism based on intuitions of God's transcendence and worthiness of worship. Pruss defends a moderately strong version of divine simplicity, in which God is identical to each of His attributes, while remaining agnostic on the still stronger Avicennan-Thomistic claim that God is identical to His own existence.

There are also, of course, powerful objections to classical theism, especially in its strongest form. As we have mentioned, Rogers, Lebens, and O'Connor all offer such objections, asking whether a strong doctrine of divine simplicity and impassibility is consistent with God's knowledge of and concern for contingent creatures. How can God know multiple things if He is identical to a simple act of knowing? Can we have a

personal or covenantal relationship with an impassible being? If God's knowledge is identical to His will, how can God know our free actions without also willing them, including our sins? Rogers, Lebens, and O'Connor all seek to resolve these problems by relaxing some of the strictness of the Thomistic model.

Other contributors, however, argue that no such relaxation is necessary. Gregory Doolan argues that divine simplicity is compatible with the existence of many divine "ideas" or universals. Doolan identifies ideas with productive concepts, and he explains why Thomas takes such ideas to be essential to an account of creation as an intentional act. God knows His own essence as imitable in many different ways. The divine ideas are these different ways, and so they are objects of God's understanding, not distinct internal vehicles by which God understands them. A multiplicity of intentional objects is compatible with the internal simplicity of God's understanding.

Christopher Tomaszewski takes up a common objection to divine simplicity: the claim that this entails the necessary existence of all created facts (a "modal collapse" of created contingency into the necessity of the divine nature). Although Tomaszewski demonstrates that the common objection commits a fallacy of modal reasoning, he constructs a further objection that is more difficult to dismiss. This new objection turns on the following questions: How can God be intrinsically indiscernible in all possible worlds, while intentionally creating different things in each of them? How can the effects of God's volition vary if the volition itself cannot vary intrinsically? Tomaszewski argues that this is a problem for any theist, independently of the doctrine of divine simplicity and impassibility. If God's volition is in an intrinsically contingent state, then this state would have to be one of the things that God intentionally causes to exist. If we are then to avoid an infinite regress, we must admit that two divine volitions can differ in their content without differing intrinsically.

James Dolezal defends divine impassibility from two challenges: that from God's knowledge of creation, and that from God's love of creatures. Dolezal argues that God can perfectly know the character of our experiences without undergoing those experiences Himself. God knows these experiences, along with everything else in creation, simply by being their principal cause. Classical theism does not posit God as distant from creation: to the contrary, it puts God in the most intimate possible relationship to us. God's love for us is not stirred up in Him by us but consists in His willing for us every good.

Finally, there is the question of the compatibility of classical theism with particular Christian doctrines, in particular, with divine action in the world, with the Trinity, with the Incarnation of Christ, and with the Palamite doctrine of divine energies. These issues are taken up in the chapters by Michael J. Dodds, Mark Spencer, Timothy Pawl, and James Rooney.

Michael Dodds argues that the revival of Aristotelian concepts of causality in recent philosophy creates new room for divine action in the

world, setting aside worries about violating supposed laws of nature. In addition, this Aristotelian model enables us to distinguish divine "primary" causality from creaturely "secondary" causation, which distinction can enable us to explain how chance and freedom can exist in creation without any limitation of divine power or providence.

Mark Spencer mentions several promising strategies for reconciling the distinctness of the three Divine Persons with the absolute simplicity of God. In his chapter, he seeks to do something more ambitious: to argue that the truth of classical theism entails the multiplicity of divine persons. Spencer makes use of the concept of *beauty* as his middle term. He argues that beauty should be counted among the transcendentals, along with being, unity, goodness, and truth. As Thomas Aquinas argued in the Fourth Way, the first cause must possess every perfection to a superlative degree. Hence, God must be absolutely beautiful. Spencer contends that one of the essential characteristics of beauty is the coexistence of both communicability and incommunicability. Hence, there must be a distinction within God between beauty as communicated and beauty as incommunicable, corresponding to the Son and the Father. Spencer argues for the reality of the Spirit along traditional lines.

Timothy Pawl defends the orthodox two-nature account of the Incarnation and demonstrates its consistency with divine simplicity, properly defined. Pawl argues that we must replace a naive definition of simplicity with one that makes explicit reference to natures: something is simple if it has (or is) a nature that has no parts. Since Christ has both a divine nature and a human one, He can be both absolutely simple with respect to the one nature and complex with respect to the other.

James Rooney considers the problem of reconciling absolute divine simplicity, in which God is identical with each of His properties, with the theory of divine energies, as formulated by Gregory Palamas. Divine energies, in this account, are multiple, uncreated manifestations or activities of God. Rooney argues that, contrary to first impressions, classical theism is not only compatible with but actually entails the existence of such energies. Rooney notes that Palamas himself was in no doubt of the compatibility of the two doctrines. Palamas explicitly rejects the idea that God has accidents or distinct properties. Rather than being intrinsic modifications of God, the divine energies are the truthmakers for extrinsic, relational predications involving God, including His relation as Creator of the world. Rooney then considers the question of how these relational properties could be said to be uncreated and fundamental to God. Rooney argues that we should interpret the activities as involving logical rather than "real" relations (using Thomistic terminology), as long as we recognize that some logical relations are fundamental to God. He proposes that the fundamentality involved is ideological rather than ontological, reflecting a deep fact about our modes of predicating properties of God. By

incorporating the Palamite distinction between essence and energies, Rooney extends the defenses of absolute simplicity and impassibility made by Tomaszewski and Dolezal.

The debate over classical theism should be of interest even to those belonging to no religious tradition at all. As the contributors to this volume make clear, the possibility of God as classically conceived raises deep questions about the nature of consciousness, knowledge, and will. If intentionality is a fundamental feature of reality, then the existence of representations, whether internal or external, cannot be a necessary concomitant of consciousness, since any representation must derive its content from some prior act of an intellect. Hence, taking intentionality seriously should open us to the possibility of a simple God who is able to know and to will many things, some necessarily and some contingently. Conversely, if we believe that intentionality is reducible to the causal roles of the internal states of a cognitive agent, then such a simple God would be a contradiction in terms.

Similarly, if we conceive of the will as consisting in the causation of action by the agent (rather than by some event in the agent's mental life), this renders a simple free agent possible, since the existence of a prior, internal change within the agent is not essential to the agent's acting voluntarily and freely.

Human agents require internal representations, both for the sake of consciousness and for the sake of voluntary action, but these internal representations are needed only for the sake of enabling ratiocination, and ratiocination in turn is needed only as a result of the limitations of our knowledge. A hypothetical being with complete and unmediated knowledge would require no such internal representations, and so could be consciously aware of and intentionally affect an external, contingent world without any internal modification.

Considering the possibility of a simple God also sheds light on the nature of phenomenology. If changing and contingent facts are immediately present to such a God, without the intermediation of internal representations, then whether such a God's phenomenology could take on changing and contingent coloration depends on whether we accept a purely intentionalist conception of phenomenology in general. If a conscious being's phenomenology is entirely determined by the intentional content of its cognitive states, then there is no bar to our attributing a rich and varying phenomenology even to the simplest of beings.

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Section I

What is Classical Theism?

1 What is Classical Theism?

Edward Feser

1.1 Its Content and Proponents

Theism, generically understood, is the thesis that there is a God who created the world.[1] It is the common core conviction of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But there are different ways of developing this basic thesis—of spelling out exactly what is the nature of God and of his relationship to the world. *Classical* theism is the approach to doing so that has dominated Western philosophy and theology for most of their history. Its roots are in scripture and in Greek philosophy, especially the Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. Its great exponents in ancient and medieval thought include Philo of Alexandria and Moses Maimonides in the context of Judaism; Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas in the context of Christianity; and Al-Kindi and Avicenna in the context of Islam. In contemporary philosophy of religion its most prominent advocates are Thomists, both Catholic and Protestant.[2] But it is also represented by non-Thomist Scholastics, Eastern Orthodox theologians, and contemporary philosophers who do not fall into any of these camps but who are nevertheless sympathetic to Neo-Platonic or Aristotelian philosophical theology.[3] Though the expression "classical theism" is not, as far as I know, to be found in any of the works of the ancient and medieval thinkers referred to, it has in recent decades come to be fairly commonly used as a label for the distinctive conception of God and his relationship to the world that those thinkers hold in common, both by defenders of that conception and by its critics.[4]

So far, of course, I have said *who* endorses classical theism, but not *what* classical theism itself amounts to. Here is one way to approach that question. Consider the distinction traditionally drawn in philosophy between the *ordo essendi* or order of being, and the *ordo cognoscendi* or order of discovery. The order of being comprises all the things that exist, which in classical and medieval philosophy were commonly understood to be arranged in a hierarchy – inorganic things, vegetative forms of life, animal life, and so on. The order of discovery concerns the sequence by which we arrive at an ever deeper understanding of reality—initial

sensory experience, inference to the causes of things experienced, knowledge of the natures of these causes, and so forth.

Classical theism, I propose, can to a first approximation best be understood as the thesis that God is to be conceived of *first and foremost* as the ultimate reality in the order of being, and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. It is worth emphasizing that the thesis is biblical no less than it is philosophical. That God is the ultimate reality in the order of being is expressed in Anselm's famous definition of God as *that than which nothing greater can be conceived* (*Proslogium*, Chapter II). But it also finds expression in God's description of himself as "I Am He Who Is" in Exodus 3:14, at least if we follow Aquinas in taking this to imply that God is the unique thing whose essence is identical to his existence.[5] For this in turn entails that God stands at the apex of the hierarchy of reality, insofar as he alone need not and cannot have his existence imparted to him by another (*Summa Theologiae* I.3.4). That God is the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery is expressed in arguments like the one Aquinas gives for the claim that there must indeed be something whose essence is identical to its existence, to serve as the first uncaused cause of the existence of everything else (*De Ente et Essentia*, Chapter 4). But it also finds expression in the very first line of scripture: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

The two components of the thesis (the one referring to the order of being and the other to the order of discovery) parallel the two methods by which philosophical theologians have proposed fleshing out the concept of God: *perfect-being theology* and *first-cause theology*.[6] Perfect-being theology starts with the idea that God is the most perfect being there could be, and then goes on to deduce, in a "top-down" fashion, what else must be true of him given that he is supremely perfect. First-cause theology starts with the idea that God is the ultimate cause of the world, and goes on to deduce, in a "bottom-up" fashion, what else must be true of him given that the world is his effect. Classical theists typically regard both methods as legitimate but tend to emphasize one over the other. For example, Anselm would certainly not deny that God is the first cause and ultimate explanation of the world, but in his best-known arguments he emphasizes instead the implications of the idea that God is the greatest conceivable being. Aquinas would certainly not deny that God is the most perfect being possible, but in spelling out the divine nature he tends to emphasize instead what follows from his being the first cause of the world.

Now, *non*-classical theists also typically take God to be the ultimate reality in the order of being, and ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. Classical theists, meanwhile, make several further claims about the divine nature which are widely regarded as characteristic of their position, and which nonclassical theists reject. But recall

that what I said is that for the classical theist, God is to be conceived of *first and foremost* as the ultimate reality in the order of being, and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. The notion of God's *ultimacy* has a *regulative status* in classical theism that it does not have in nonclassical forms of theism. It puts strict constraints on what else we can say about God, and on how we ought to interpret the other things we say about him.

The other, and more controversial, things that classical theism says about God are taken by the classical theist to be nothing less than the ineluctable implications of taking God to be the ultimate reality in the order of being and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. For example, classical theism famously insists that God is simple or non-composite, impassible, immutable, eternal in the sense of atemporal, omniscient in a sense that entails complete knowledge of the future, and omnipotent in the sense that there can be nothing that exists or occurs independently of his causal power. Classical theists hold that these attributes follow from God's being the ultimate reality in the order of being and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. Hence, it is claimed, to deny any of them is at least implicitly to deny God's ultimacy.

The critic of classical theism rejects one or more of these attributes, and typically does so on the grounds that they conflict with some desideratum the critic takes to be non-negotiable. For example, some critics claim that one or more of these attributions conflict with what is said about God in scripture; or that they conflict with God's being a person with whom we can have a relationship; or that they conflict with our having free will; or that they are problematic in light of some metaphysics to which the critic is committed. From the point of view of classical theism, such objections entail that the nonclassical theist takes the desiderata in question, rather than God's ultimacy, to have fundamental regulative status in spelling out the concept of God, or at least that these desiderata have significantly weakened the nonclassical theist's commitment to divine ultimacy.

I have indicated that classical theism involves distinctive views not only about the divine nature but about the relationship between God and the world. One of them is the doctrine of *divine conservation*, according to which the world could not persist in being even for an instant unless God were conserving it in being. Another is the doctrine of *divine concurrence*, which holds that created things could not exercise causal power even for an instant unless God were concurring with their activity by imparting causal power to them. The basic idea is that if things could exist or operate independently of divine causality, even for a moment, then God would not be the ultimate reality or ultimate explanation of things. A world that could in some sense exist independently of God would to that extent be equally ultimate in the order of being, and a

world that could act independently of God would to that extent have an explanation that is equally ultimate in the order of discovery.[7]

With all of these considerations in hand, we are now in a position to suggest a more adequate characterization of classical theism, which I would put as follows:

> **Classical theism:** the thesis that God is to be conceived of first and foremost as the ultimate reality in the order of being and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery; that when followed out consistently this entails that the divine attributes must include simplicity, immutability, impassibility, atemporality, complete knowledge of the future, and causal involvement in everything that exists or occurs; and that as corollaries we ought to affirm the doctrines of divine conservation and concurrence.

There is also a strong tendency among classical theists to emphasize apophatic or negative theology as crucial to a proper understanding of at least many of the divine attributes, and related to this is a further tendency to insist that theological language must not be given a univocal interpretation (where an especially influential alternative to such an interpretation is the Thomistic position that theological language is to be understood analogically). This is a natural position to take given some of the attributes classical theists ascribe to God. However, there are some classical theists (in particular, Scotists) who regard theological language as univocal. Hence a rejection of such an account of theological language cannot be taken to be essential to classical theism, even if it is often a concomitant of it.

1.2 A Thesis of Both Natural and Revealed Theology

I emphasized above that classical theism is a thesis as biblical as it is philosophical. This is important because its critics often accuse it of allowing considerations deriving from Greek philosophy to trump the deliverances of divine revelation. The accusation is unjust in several respects.

First, and as I have noted, there are prominent scriptural passages like Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 3:14 that express the basic principles that the classical theist claims ought to regulate all our theorizing about the divine nature. There are also passages that can be taken to support the ascription to God of certain controversial divine attributes that classical theists affirm and their critics reject.[8] For example, Christ is said in scripture not only to have life but to *be* life (John 14:6), he is said not only to have divine power and wisdom but to *be* the power and wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), and God is said not merely to have love but to *be* love (1 John 4:8). Such statements imply an identity of God with

his attributes, which is one of the components of the doctrine of divine simplicity.[9] There are also passages asserting that God does not change (Psalm 101:26-27; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17), which in the view of classical theists support the attribution of immutability to God.[10] Naturally, scriptural prophesies imply divine knowledge of future events. And so on.

Of course, critics of classical theism would reject its interpretations of such scriptural passages, and they would appeal to other scriptural passages in defense of their denial of some of the attributes classical theists ascribe to God. For example, in criticizing the claim that God is immutable and impassible, they would appeal to passages that seem to imply that petitionary prayer can cause God to change his mind (Genesis 18:23-33; Exodus 32:11-14). But this brings us to a second point. Even critics of classical theism do not themselves hold that every biblical passage should be taken at face value. Again, they would say that the passages that seem to imply that God does not change do not really mean that. In other contexts, they would even agree with classical theist readings that take certain scriptural passages to be metaphorical. For example, there are passages that on a straightforward reading seem to imply that God has legs (Genesis 3:8), that he has eyes (Psalm 11:3), that he breathes (Job 4:9), and so on. Most critics of classical theism would agree with classical theists that these anthropomorphic verses should not be taken literally. They would agree that, since scripture itself tells us that God is the creator of the material world, it follows that he cannot himself be material, and thus cannot literally have a body.[11] It is precisely scriptural teaching that entails that certain passages of scripture must be interpreted metaphorically.

But this is precisely the sort of thing classical theists would say about those passages that seem to imply that God can change, or that God lacks some attribute ascribed to him by classical theists. They would say, for example, that if God were capable of change, then he would have potentialities as well as actualities, and would therefore be composed of parts rather than simple or non-composite, and would therefore require a cause of his own. In that case, he would not be the creator of everything other than himself—contrary to what scripture itself teaches. Accordingly, scriptural teaching itself entails that God cannot be changeable, just as it entails that he cannot be material. Therefore, it entails that passages that seem to imply that God can change, no less than passages that seem to imply that he has a body, must not be interpreted literally.[12]

Critics of classical theism will, naturally, disagree with this line of reasoning. The point, though, is that it simply will not do to pretend that the dispute between classical theists and their critics has to do with whether or not to allow extra-biblical philosophical doctrines to trump the teaching of scripture. Classical theists, no less than their

critics, can claim to be merely consistently working out the implications of scriptural teaching.[13]

A third problem with the claim that classical theism pits purely philosophical doctrines against the deliverances of special divine revelation is that it presupposes too narrow a conception of special divine revelation. Or at least it does so from the point of view of non-Protestant Christians. For Eastern Orthodox Christians, in order to understand what God has specially revealed to us, we need to look not only to scripture, but also to tradition, and in particular to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church and the first seven councils of the Church. For Catholics, we need to look not only to scripture, the Fathers, and the first seven councils, but also to the later councils and to the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium of the Church.

But the key claims of classical theism are clearly taught in these other authoritative sources. For example, the doctrine of divine simplicity is taught by Fathers of the Church such as Athanasius and Augustine, and by councils such as Lateran IV (1215) and Vatican I (1869–1870). Of course, some critics of classical theism will deny that these sources really are authoritative. But the point is that the disagreement between classical theists and their critics in that case is not over whether we should allow philosophical ideas to trump the deliverances of divine revelation. Rather, it is a dispute over whether certain claims (such as the doctrine of divine simplicity) really have been divinely revealed or not.

Having said all that, it is certainly true that classical theists *also* insist that their position follows from sound philosophical reasoning about God no less than it follows from special divine revelation. Nor would they deny that the Greek philosophers in particular developed key insights about how natural theology ought to spell out the divine nature. In a rudimentary form, these insights can be found even before Plato and Aristotle, in Pre-Socratic reflection about what ultimate reality must be like.[14] As Lloyd Gerson notes, especially crucial in this connection was the gradual development in Greek philosophy of the notion of an *archē* or first principle from which all else derives, which is radically unlike the mundane reality it explains, causes without being caused, and exists of necessity (Gerson 1990, pp. 5–14). In Anaximander, this insight takes the form of the thesis that the first principle of all things must be *apeiron*—"unbounded" or "unlimited," unlike the bounded or limited things it explains; in Xenophanes, it is evident in the refusal to ascribe any creaturely attributes to God; in Aristotle, it is conveyed in the judgment that the prime unmoved mover must be devoid of potentiality; in Plotinus, in the idea that the One must be utterly simple or non-composite. The idea is that anything that was bounded, or had creaturely attributes, or potentiality in need of actualization, or parts in need of combining, would require a cause of its own, and thus simply would not *be* the *archē* from which all else derives.

To make use of such ideas in articulating and defending the conception of God deriving from the sources of special revelation by no means entails corrupting the latter by reading alien elements into it. On the contrary, the traditional Christian interpretation of the significance of Greek philosophy is that it was a crucial part of the "preparation for the Gospel," bringing the Gentile world into a position from which the central claims of Christianity could be properly understood. As St. Paul famously noted, the idea that God incarnate died on the cross was a stumbling block for the Jews, and seemed foolishness to the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:23). Why would that have been?

It is clear enough why a Jewish audience of the day would be scandalized by it. A commitment to God's unicity and absolute distinctness from the creation had been cemented into the psychology of the people of Israel over the course of centuries, as a long series of prophets and divine punishments gradually purged the nation of any vestige of idolatry. The claim that there are three Persons in the one God, and that one of them took on flesh and died on a cross, was therefore bound to be shocking. But these ideas would not have been properly understood if they were *not* shocking. If God is one, how can he be tripersonal? If he is the creator of the material world, how could he take on flesh? It was essential that the Jewish people, the first recipients of the Gospel, understood that however these doctrines are to be spelled out, they are *not* to be interpreted in terms of the idea that the God of Israel is merely part of some pantheon of corporeal deities—as they very easily would have been interpreted had a horror of idolatry not taken deep root among the Jewish people by the first century A.D.

Now, the Gentiles too needed a proper conception of the divine nature if they were correctly to understand the central claims of Christianity. Suppose your understanding of the divine were molded entirely by stories about the gods of Olympus, or by myths about dying deities like Adonis, Attis, Osiris, or Dionysus. Then the Trinity will sound like just another pantheon, the virginal conception of Jesus will be interpreted as comparable to Zeus's impregnation of various mortal women, and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus will be reminiscent of a dying and rising fertility god. In other words, they will seem to be mere variations on familiar pagan themes. However, if instead you conceive of God as the purely actual prime unmoved mover of the world, or as the non-composite One from which all else derives, then the claims of Christianity will sound as shocking as they did to the Jews of the first century. How could that which is pure actuality take on flesh and suffer? How could that which is utterly simple or non-composite be three divine Persons?

Naturally, the Christian theologian does not think that the central claims of Christianity *are* indeed scandalous or foolish. The point, though, is that they are so subtle and difficult—and indeed, they are

claimed to be *mysteries* in the sense that we could not have learned of them apart from special divine revelation—that a proper initial understanding of them *should* be jarring. Aquinas argues that what we can know about God by way of unaided reason we know by inference from the created order to its creator. But since creation is the work of the Persons of the Trinity together, such inference is bound to reveal to us the unity of God while obscuring his tripersonal nature (*Summa Theologiae* I.32.1). The Trinity is, accordingly, bound to be a surprising doctrine, and if it were not surprising, that would likely reflect some serious misunderstanding of it (for example, in terms of a reading that would divide the divine substance and yield polytheism, or confound the Persons and yield modalism).

So, natural theology of the kind that developed in the Greek philosophical tradition provided a preparation for Christian revelation supplementary to that of the Old Testament. Gentile audiences no less than Jewish ones needed preexisting conceptual resources in terms of which the Gospel could be correctly understood. To borrow an expression from Protestant theologian Emil Brunner, natural theology provided a "point of contact" between Christian revelation and Gentile culture.[15]

Another objection to classical theism related to its allegedly excessive deference to philosophy is that it yields a conception of God that makes him too cold and distant to attract our religious sentiments. One problem with this claim is that it presupposes too great a bifurcation between our rationality and our affective lives. Suppose someone becomes convinced through philosophical argument that he is (say) sustained in being at every moment by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent uncaused cause, apart from whose action one would instantly lapse into nothingness. Perhaps someone could be convinced of this and yet remain emotionally unmoved by it, but it is hardly implausible to suppose that someone *could* be moved by it. Certainly it seems quite implausible (and contrary to the experience of those of us whose conversion to Christianity was mediated by philosophy) to stomp one's foot and insist that one *could not* be moved by it. It is also contrary to the facts of the history of natural theology, which include Aristotle's conviction that the best life must include the contemplation and service of God,[16] and Plotinus's conception of the One as a father we have forgotten (*Enneads* V.1.1).

Then there is the fact that one could certainly arrive at a belief in the reality of God, conceived of in the remote and forbidding manner ascribed to classical theism by its critics, precisely as a result of religious experience rather than a dry syllogism. Rudolf Otto's (1923) famous analysis in his book *The Idea of the Holy* illustrates the point.[17] Otto characterizes the fundamental religious experience as one of a sense of radical dependence on that which is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. That is to say, it involves an awareness of being the creature of

something which is, first of all, "wholly other" than us and which cannot entirely be captured via ordinary concepts. So radically different is it from the mundane world that attempts to describe its nature inevitably have the air of paradox. Second, we are, accordingly, left in a kind of stark wonder, and indeed an awe and dread of it as something over-whelming, majestic, and unapproachable. But third, at the same time this awe and dread are mixed with a fascination and attraction for this wholly other ground of our being.

Whatever one thinks of Otto's phenomenological analysis, what it captures is something far closer to the classical theist's conception of God than it is to, say, the way open theists or theistic personalists conceive of him. It is, for example, clearly more consonant with most classical theists' tendency to emphasize apophatic theology and non-univocal accounts of theological language than with the nonclassical theist's predilection for univocal descriptions of God. Yet Otto's account is not the result of a bloodlessly rationalist approach to theology, and indeed his aim was precisely to avoid such an approach. It also gives the lie to the assumption that the supposedly remote and forbidding God of classical theism could not be religiously attractive.

1.3 The Centrality of Simplicity

Though the critics of classical theism are typically opposed fairly vehe-mently to several of its components, its doctrine of divine simplicity is perhaps the central target of their criticism. Other crucial divine attri-butes are taken by classical theists to follow from divine simplicity. It is the attribute that nonclassical theists often take to be the one that most makes God seem to be abstract and impersonal. They also often evince puzzlement at the emphasis classical theists put on it. So the doctrine of divine simplicity seems worthy of special comment in a general characterization of classical theism.

What the doctrine says is that God is devoid of parts of any kind. Naturally, that includes parts of the sort physical objects have, whether understood in terms of the particles posited by modern physics, in terms of the substantial form and prime matter posited by the Aristotelian, or in some other terms. About that much, classical theists and most of their critics are in agreement. But the doctrine also denies that God has parts of a *metaphysical* kind. For instance, according to Thomists, the essence of each kind of created thing comprises a *genus* and a *specific difference*. The essence of a human being, for example, is to fall under the genus *animal*, and to differ as a species from other animals in being *rational*. *Animality* and *rationality*, our genus and specific difference, are meta-physical parts of our nature. According to the doctrine of divine sim-plicity, God does not have parts of this kind. He does not fall under some genus, and thus there is no specific difference that sets him apart from

other things in a genus. In a created thing, there is also a distinction between its *essence* and its *existence*, and these too amount to metaphysical parts. But God has no parts of this kind either. His essence *just is* his existence rather than something distinct from it. Nor is there any distinction in God between his substance and the attributes of that substance. God just *is* his power, just *is* his knowledge, just *is* his goodness, and so on. Nor is there any distinction in God between actuality and potentiality. He is pure actuality, with no potentialities that might be actualized.[18]

Now, the reason God is said to be simple or non-composite in these ways is that nothing that is composite can be *ultimate* in the manner that classical theism insists God is. One way to understand why is in terms of the Thomistic thesis that anything that is composed of parts will of necessity possess potentiality that must be actualized in order for that thing to exist. But what is like that will, accordingly, require a cause, and thus will not be the *first* cause of things—it will not be the ultimate reality in the order of being or the ultimate explanation in the order of discovery. Since being ultimate in these ways is just what it is to be God, it follows that God must be simple or non-composite.

The *uniqueness* of God is also taken by classical theists to be closely connected to his simplicity. Anything in which there is a distinction between its genus and specific difference, or between its essence and its existence, is such that it is of a kind of which there could at least in principle be more than one member. In particular, it will be one member of a genus of which there could in principle be other members, and one instance of an essence of which there could in principle be other instances. Accordingly, to place God within a genus or to affirm a distinction between him and his essence is implicitly to allow that there might in principle be more than one God. It is to affirm at most that there *happens to be* one God, not that it is *necessary* that there be only one God. David Bentley Hart (Hart 2013, p. 127) suggests that to reject classical theism is implicitly to adopt a kind of "monopolytheism."

So, divine simplicity is not some mere curiosity, the classical theist's attachment to which is either inexplicable or at best derives from some fixation on abstract philosophical principle. Rather, the classical theist takes it to be a necessary implication of the biblical affirmation that there is one God who is the creator of everything other than himself.

It is in part on the basis of divine simplicity that the classical theist ascribes to God further attributes of which nonclassical theists are critical. For example, if God is pure actuality and lacks potentiality, then he cannot undergo change but is immutable. If he is immutable, then he must be eternal in the sense of being atemporal. Moreover, if he is immutable, he cannot be said to gain or lose any intrinsic attributes. If he does not gain any intrinsic attributes, then he cannot come to learn things he did not previously know, and must in general be impassible.

If he is atemporal and does not know things by learning them, then he must know what he knows in a single timeless act. His knowledge of the future as well as of the past and present must be part of this one act, in which case he knows everything that *will* happen in just the way that he knows what *has* happened. And so forth. (Obviously, this is all very quick, but I am not trying here to present a detailed case for these various divine attributes. I am simply indicating how the classical theist takes divine simplicity to have a number of significant implications.)

Through divine simplicity, then, much of the rest of the classical theist conception of God is claimed to follow from the fundamental thesis that God is the ultimate reality in the order of being and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. Classical theism and divine simplicity thus arguably stand or fall together, which accounts for the central place the debate over divine simplicity has had in the larger dispute between classical theists and their critics.

1.4 Neo-Theist Rivals

In order to try thoroughly to understand a view, it is always useful to consider the rivals to that view and how they differ from it. You can better grasp the significance of a claim when you see what happens in the thinking of those who reject it. Norman Geisler uses the apt umbrella term "neo-theism" to characterize the different varieties of nonclassical forms of theism that have arisen in reaction against classical theism.[19] There are four main varieties: *deism*, *process theism*, *open theism*, and *theistic personalism*. Let's consider each of these in turn.

The word "deism" is used in different ways, but for present purposes I will take it to be the view that once God creates the world, it is capable of continuing in existence without him. This is a significant departure from classical theism because it implicitly denies that God is the ultimate reality and the ultimate explanation of the existence of things, at least in the strongest possible sense of "ultimate." For if the world might exist *now* without God conserving it in being, why could it not have existed *always* without him conserving it in being? A divine first cause becomes, as Laplace would say, a hypothesis of which we have no need. The world is at least equally as fundamental as God, insofar as it could in principle exist without him. Indeed, it may even itself be the fundamental reality, at least insofar as if we deny divine conservation, we thereby undermine the main grounds we have for affirming God's existence in the first place.[20]

Now, I mentioned above that classical theism affirms divine concurrence as well as divine conservation. Here is one way to understand why. Thomists are committed to the principle *agere sequitur esse*, or "action follows being." The idea is that the manner in which a thing acts reflects the manner in which it exists. When the implications of this are

worked out, it arguably supports the conclusion that if a thing can at least in principle exercise causal power apart from divine concurrence, then it can also at least in principle exist apart from divine conservation. In short, to reject divine concurrence is implicitly to accept deism. Hence the classical theist must affirm divine concurrence no less than divine conservation.[21]

Process theism (also known as "panentheism") holds that God possesses potentiality as well as actuality, and is therefore changeable and passible.[22] It takes the world to be continuous with God, in a manner analogous to the relationship of the body to the mind.[23] Process theists also reject any conception of omnipotence on which everything that happens involves divine concurrence.[24] *Open theism*, meanwhile, rejects the conception of omniscience according to which God knows what we will do in the future.[25] Accordingly, it holds that God can learn, and therefore is changeable, and therefore has potentialities as well as actuality, though it does not share process theism's blurring of the distinction between God and the world. Process theism's qualification of divine omnipotence and open theism's qualification of divine omniscience are motivated by the supposition that left unqualified, these attributes would conflict with the reality of human free choice.

The basic thesis of *theistic personalism* is that whatever else God is, he is an instance of the genus *person*, alongside other instances such as human persons, angelic persons, and any other species of persons that there might be (such as, according to some views, extraterrestrials and artificial intelligence). Now, Brian Davies (2004, chapter 1) introduced the term "theistic personalism" to characterize a variety of positions in contemporary philosophy of religion that depart from classical theism in various ways, including process theism and open theism. Hence he uses it more or less as a synonym for "neo-theism." However, it seems to me more apt as a label for a *species* of neo-theism that differs from the ones already considered. Each species has a different fundamental motivation or characteristic. Deism is arguably motivated more by considerations about the ontological independence of the created order rather than about the divine nature *per se*. Open theism is motivated primarily by concerns about human free will. Process theism is motivated by that concern too, but also by a commitment to a general process metaphysics (especially the version developed by Alfred North Whitehead). Adherents of the view that I am suggesting we reserve the "theistic personalist" label for those who do not necessarily share any of those concerns. Their fundamental motivation is instead, again, the conviction that whatever else we say about God, we must first and foremost take him to be a *person* of a certain kind, albeit a person who does not have the limitations that human persons have.

When introducing the notion of theistic personalism, Davies (2004, p. 9) cites as representatives of the view two contemporary

philosophers of religion who could not be more prominent: Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne. It is important to emphasize, though, that the view is *implicit* in their writings rather than explicit. Nor, as far as I know, have they applied the "theistic personalist" label to themselves. Again, that is Davies's term for a tendency that he claims (correctly, in my view) to be present in their work. Plantinga (2011, p. ix) takes theism to be "the thought that there is such a person as God: a personal agent who has created the world and is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good." Swinburne suggests that "that God is a person, yet one without a body, seems the most elementary claim of theism." Plantinga (1980, p. 47) rejects the doctrine of divine simplicity on the grounds that if it were true, then, he alleges, it would follow that God "isn't a person but a mere abstract object." Swinburne (1977, p. 99) suggests that we can easily conceive of what it is to be an "omnipresent spirit" of the kind he says God is by simply imagining what it would be like for us gradually to come to have a kind of knowledge and control over the rest of the material world that is similar to the knowledge and control we have over our bodies (moving other things about by way of a kind of telekinesis, etc.). Swinburne claims to accept a version of divine simplicity, but he rejects the traditional understanding of it, according to which the divine attributes are identical to each other and to God (Swinburne 1994, pp. 160–3). Moreover, his interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity is so remote from the Christian classical theist's understanding of it that Swinburne posits *three* divine individuals (Swinburne 1994, chapter 8; Feser 1997, pp. 175–84), which clearly implies that there are parts in the Godhead (and arguably amounts to polytheism to boot).

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that what the classical theist objects to in theistic personalism is *not* that the view takes God to be personal, as opposed to an impersonal force or principle. Most classical theists agree that God is personal, since they attribute intellect, knowledge, will, love, and other personal attributes to him. When the classical theist objects to the statement that "God is a person," the problematic word is not "person" but "a." There are two main problems with it, one philosophical and the other having to do with what Christians take us to know through special divine revelation.

The philosophical problem is that to say that God is *a* person, and then go on to suggest that we can understand what kind of person he is by comparing and contrasting him with human persons, suggests that God falls into the species *divine person*, where that species sits alongside the species *human person* under the common genus *person*. That would entail in turn that the species God falls under has a specific difference that sets it apart from human beings and whatever other species might fall under the genus *person*, and that God is a particular instance of the essence defined by the genus and specific difference of

the species he falls under. But all of this conflicts with divine simplicity. If God falls under a species, then he has metaphysical parts, namely a genus and a specific difference. If he is an instance of the essence that defines this species, then he has further metaphysical parts, namely essence and existence.

That their views imply such composition of parts in God is in any event clear enough from the fact that Plantinga explicitly denies divine simplicity and that Swinburne qualifies simplicity to the point of effectively denying it, at least from a classical theist point of view. But if God has such parts, then, the classical theist argues, he cannot be unique *in principle* but at most only in contingent fact (since there could always in principle be something else that instantiates his essence). Moreover, if he has such parts, then he will require a cause of his own. In these ways, he just will not be the ultimate reality in the order of being or the ultimate explanation in the order of explanation.

The problem that special divine revelation poses for theistic personalism is that the claim that "God is a person" seems to conflict with the doctrine of the Trinity. As Davies (2006, p. 59) points out, the first time that formulation appears in English appears to be from a seventeenth-century trial in which a Unitarian was accused of heresy precisely for claiming that God is a person. The doctrine of the Trinity maintains, of course, that God is *three* Persons in one substance, not *a* person. To say flatly that "God is a person" seems to insinuate either that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mere guises under which this one person appears (which would be the heresy of modalism) or that God is to be identified with one of the Persons of the Trinity, presumably the Father, and that the other two Persons are lesser deities of some kind (which would suggest a kind of polytheism).

What process theism, open theism, and theistic personalism all have in common, despite their different motivations, is (the classical theist holds) a tendency toward an excessive anthropomorphism—toward what Geisler (1997, chapter 3) calls "remaking God in our image." From the point of view of classical theism, neo-theism in these various guises marks a falling away from the hard-won wisdom of millennia—from the Old Testament tradition's long and difficult purging from the people of Israel of any tendency to conceive of God in creaturely terms; from the Greek and medieval philosophical tradition's consistent working out of the implications of God's ultimacy; and from the Christian theological tradition's insistence that the divine and human natures of the Person of Christ must be understood to be utterly distinct and unmixed. Key elements of classical theism like the doctrine of divine simplicity became part of Christian orthodoxy precisely because they are safeguards of other components of orthodoxy, and not because of some purported insinuation into Christianity of alien pagan philosophical elements.

Notes

1 Used even more generically, the term "theism" would cover any view that holds that a god or gods of some kind or other exist, which would include polytheism and views that affirm the existence of God but do not take the world to have been created. But in contemporary philosophy of religion, the term is commonly used in a narrower sense to connote the familiar monotheistic belief in a single creator God.

2 An influential contemporary exposition of classical theism written from a Catholic Thomist point of view can be found in (Davies 2004, chapter 1). A contemporary Protestant Thomist defense can be found in (Geisler 1997).

3 Non-Thomist varieties of Scholasticism would include Scotism and Suarezianism. A recent Eastern Orthodox defense of classical theism can be found in David Bentley Hart (2013). A recent presentation of a Neo-Platonic brand of philosophical theism can be found in Lloyd P. Gerson (1994). A recent defense of a broadly Aristotelian philosophical theism can be found in David Conway (2000).

4 For example, the label is used in this sense both in Davies' *An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion* (2004), which is sympathetic to classical theism, and in Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (1984), which is hostile to it. Unfortunately, though, contemporary usage is not as uniform as these examples might indicate. For example, in their book *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, Moreland and Craig (2003) appear to adopt "classical theism" as a label for their favored conception of God (e.g., at p. 573). But they are also critical of divine simplicity as traditionally understood and significantly qualify divine atemporality, and as we will see, this would put them outside the boundaries of classical theism as thinkers like the ones I've mentioned would understand it.

5 *Summa Theologiae* I.13.11 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.22. Of course, this interpretation of Exodus 3:14 is controversial. For discussion and defense, see (White 2016, pp. 35–44 and 292–304).

6 I borrow the labels from (Leftow, 1998). Thomas Morris (1991, p. 32) i refers to the second of these methods as "creation theology" rather than "first-cause theology." I prefer Leftow's label, since Morris's might give the uninformed reader the false impression that the distinction has something to do with whether or not one accepts "creationism" in biology.

7 In this article I am primarily concerned to explain what classical theism is rather than to argue for it. But naturally, the claims about God's nature and relationship to the world that I have been describing call for further exposition and defense. Cf. (Feser 2017), especially chapter 6.

8 For a recent discussion of the scriptural evidence favoring several attributes ascribed by classical theists to God, see (Geisler, House, and Herrera 2001).

9 For recent discussions of the scriptural foundations of the doctrine of divine simplicity, see (Duby 2016, chapters 3 and 4; Barrett 2017, chapter 5; Dolezal 2017, pp. 44–50).

10 For recent discussions of the scriptural foundations of attributing immutability to God, see (Duby 2016 pp. 133-43; Baines et al., 2015, Part II).

11 Of course, Christian classical theists would agree that in becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ, God took on a body. But the point is that though Christ had a body in his *human* nature, he did not have one in his *divine* nature.

12 Cf. (Davies 2004, pp. 170-72).

13 For a recent detailed defense of the compatibility of classical theism with scriptural teaching about the nature of God, see (Stump 2016).

14 Cf. (Jaeger 1947; Gerson 1990).

15 That is not to imply that Brunner would agree with everything I and other Thomists would say about what can be known about God via purely philosophical arguments. His own position lay somewhere in between what Thomists would say, on the one hand, and what his critic Karl Barth, who was hostile to the very idea of natural theology, would say on the other. Cf. their famous debate in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

16 *Eudemian Ethics* 1249b16–23. Cf. the discussion in (Kenny 1992, chapter 7).

17 As with Brunner, I am not claiming that Otto, who was a Protestant, would agree with everything that Thomists and other Scholastics would say about matters of natural theology.

18 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.3 for a classic defense of the claim that God must lack parts of any of these kinds.

19 Cf. (Geisler 1997) and (Geisler, House, and Herrera, 2001) Geisler himself doesn't use the hyphen, but I prefer it.

20 Or at least some classical theists (like Thomists) might hold this, since many of them hold that it is the idea that God conserves the world in being at every moment, rather than the idea that he caused it to begin to exist at some point in the past, that provides the surest avenue of demonstrating the existence of a first cause.

21 Cf. (Feser 2017 pp. 232-38) for more detailed discussion of these issues.

22 Cf. (Hartshorne 1967, pp. 71f.; Hartshorne 1964, p. 298).

23 Cf. (Hartshorne 1964, p. 185).

24 Hartshorne 1984, pp. 10–26. Hartshorne wrongly characterizes Aquinas's position on this issue as a version of the soft determinist thesis that determinism is true but that free will is compatible with it. In fact, Aquinas's position on free will does not correspond exactly to any of the positions usually considered in contemporary discussions of the topic. Cf. (Stump 2003, chapters 9 and 13; Hoffmann and Furlong 2016)

25 Cf. (Pinnock et al., 1994).

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2 Does the God of Classical Theism Exist?[1]

Robert C. Koons

Does the God of classical theism exist? The principal reason for thinking that God fits the profile defined by classical theism is this: we have good metaphysical grounds for believing both that some entity that fits this profile exist, and we have good theological grounds for believing that, if such an entity exists, it must be identical to God, that is, to the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many of the other chapters in this volume discuss the theological compatibility of classical theism and biblical and patristic theology. In this chapter, I will focus exclusively on the metaphysical question.

So, what is the profile of the God of classical theism? There are four crucial characteristics:

1   God is absolutely the first cause of all causable things.
2   God is atemporal.
3   God lacks any intrinsic, passive potentiality.
4   God has no distinct nature and no distinct act of existence: He is identical to His own act of existence, which is also His nature or essence.

It is noteworthy that this list does not contain any of the traditional omnis: omniscience, omnipotence, or omnibenevolence. I haven't included personality on the list, nor such properties as having knowledge or will. I haven't included God's infinity or perfection or uniqueness. This is not because classical theism is silent on any of these points, but because, in the classical-theist tradition, all these divine characteristics follow from the four that I have listed. They are, from an epistemological point of view (that is, in the order of human understanding), secondary characteristics of the God of classical theism. These secondary characteristics are not points of controversy between classical and nonclassical theists; in contrast, all of the primary characteristics on the list are quite controversial.

There are, therefore, two tasks which the classical theologian must complete: first, to argue successfully that some entity satisfies the four primary characteristics, and, second, to demonstrate that any being with

the primary characteristics must also have the familiar secondary characteristics. Obviously, these are not easy tasks, and I can only provide a brief outline of an argumentative strategy here.

In section 2.1, I will rely on Aristotle's argument from motion (Thomas Aquinas's First Way) to argue for the existence of an atemporal being without passive potentiality (characteristics 2 and 3). In section 2.2, I will turn to Aquinas's Second Way, attempting to demonstrate the existence of an absolutely first cause (characteristic 1). This will provide additional support for the second and third primary characteristics as well. In section 2.3, I will take up the question of the analysis of existence provided by Thomas Aquinas in *De Ente et Essentia* and related passages. This analysis will provide support for all four primary characteristics. Next, I will argue in section 2.4 that God's infinity and perfection follow from the primary characteristics, and in section 2.5 I will try to include the corollaries of God's unlimited knowledge and power. I will conclude, in section 2.6, with some thought about whether it would be possible to affirm the existence of both the God of classical theism and that of the Bible, while denying their identity.

2.1 The Argument from Motion

Good metaphysical arguments don't operate in a vacuum. They occur within a theoretical framework provided by a successful, time-tested research program. The oldest and most successful research program in metaphysics is that of the so-called perennial philosophy, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, extended by the Neo-Platonists, and developed in Western scholastic philosophy. At the core of this program is the distinction between two modes of being, *potential* and *actual*, along with a commitment to a strong principle of proportionate causation, that is, the principle that the greater the effect, the greater the cause must be. Many contemporary philosophers have defended this program (myself included), and I will here take its soundness as a starting point.

Another important assumption of the perennial philosophy concerns the dependent nature of time. Time is not merely a static dimension within which events and states can be located. Such a Block Universe picture of time would leave us with many inexplicable data, including the irreversible direction of time and causation, the fixity of the past and the openness of the future, the basis of the Second Law of Thermodynamics and other irreversible laws, and our universal experience of the passage of time. Aristotle provides a much more satisfying account of time in Book III of his *Physics*: time is simply the measure of change. Change is the more fundamental phenomenon, and the distinctive characteristics of time are derivable from the nature of change.

This hypothesis requires that change itself not be given a real definition in terms of time. That is, we must reject Bertrand Russell's At-At theory

of change (Russell 1922, Lecture VI), according to which a thing x undergoes change just in case it has one feature at some time t_1 and a contrary feature at some later time t_2. Instead, we must define change as Aristotle does. A thing x is undergoing change just in case there is some feature F of such a kind that x has a potentiality for F-ness that is in some degree of partial actualization. This definition does not make any reference to moments of time or their temporal relations of earlier and later. However, it does entail that if some entity x is undergoing change with respect to F-ness, there must be earlier and later times of such a kind that x is progressively closer to F at the successively later moments of time. Partial actualization requires at least two distinct modes of being (i.e., instants of time), one in which x is (still) only potentially F, and another in which it is actually F. In fact, there must be an infinite number of such instances, each with a different degree of actuality of x's F-ness, with the full actualization of x's potential for F-ness occurring in exactly one of these. The direction of time is determined by the prior direction of change: if x's potentiality for F-ness is partially actualized, and this partial actualization corresponds to a set of moments, then the later moments in that set must be ones in which x is closer to being F.

Now let's add to this picture the assumption that all change must have a cause. Another word for 'change' in this context is 'passion'. Let's assume, then, that every passion has a corresponding action. On this picture, the action of the agent is the cause; the passion of the patient is the effect. Causation always involves two or more substances. Here we will also introduce a principle of proportionate causality. It is obvious, for example, that actual change or passion can only result from actual action, involving an actually existing agent and an actually possessed active power. A merely potential event cannot be the actual cause of any actual change. A merely potential agent cannot act.

If we were to abandon this principle of ontologically proportionate causality, we would have no explanation for the asymmetry and irreflexivity of causation. That is, we couldn't explain why a given passion couldn't be its own cause, promoting itself from mere potentiality to actuality. This would be tantamount to rejecting the causal principle altogether.

We have already seen that every passion must be located in time, since time is the measure of change. What is the temporal relation (if any) between an action and its corresponding passion? There are four logical possibilities: (i) the action is earlier than the passion, (ii) the action and passion are simultaneous, (iii) the action is later than the passion, or (iv) the action is unlocated in time. I will argue that only cases (ii) and (iv) are metaphysically possible.

Let's say that an entity is temporal when it has a state that is located in time. In cases (i) through (iii), the agent has a state (namely, the action) that is located in time, so the agent must be temporal. Only in case (iv) can we have an atemporal or timeless agent.

If an agent is temporal, then all its states are actual or potential only *relative to* the various moments of time (see Koons 2020; Koons forthcoming). Therefore, we cannot say that the agent's action is actual *simpliciter* but only that it is actual or potential *at* this or that time. We must also adapt our principle of causality to incorporate this relativity: for each passion, its corresponding action must be actual at the time at which the passion occurs. Actions occurring in the past or future are, at the time of the passion, merely potential. Hence, we can rule out cases (i) and (iii).

Every change must have a cause. If a temporal agent A acts at time t to produce a passion in some patient, then agent A must have undergone some change that eventuated in this particular action at time t. The temporal agent has changed from not being the agent of a particular change to being the actual agent of that change. Hence, the change in the state of the temporal agent requires a cause.

If all agents were temporal, this would lead to at least one infinite causal regress at each moment of time. We could then consider the whole plurality of things undergoing change at that time and ask, *What causes them to change?* Since these changes are all simultaneous, nothing prevents us from aggregating them together into a single, massive event. Given the principle of causation, this simultaneous plurality of events must have a cause that is both separate from itself and actual (at t). Since the plurality includes all changes occurring at this time t, the only possible cause of the plurality of changes would be the action of an atemporal agent. An atemporal action can act at any or all times without undergoing any change itself, and so without requiring a cause.

Here's another way to reach the same result. We know from experience and our best scientific theories that time passes continuously and, therefore, densely. There is a third moment of time between any two moments. This continuity of time also follows from the Aristotelian definition of change, since change must involve an infinity of moments, each bringing the patient closer to the endpoint of change. If any period of time consisted of a finite number of discrete moments, then any process of change would have to end one unit of time before reaching its endpoint, which is a contradiction in terms. At the endpoint, the patient is no longer changing (by Aristotle's definition), since it is no longer in a state of partial actualization of the process's *telos*.

In addition, the hypothesis that time is discrete or quantized and not dense leads to absurdities, especially in the case of locomotion. Suppose that two impenetrable bodies are approaching each other at a constant relative velocity of 2 meters per quantum unit of time and suppose that they begin 3 meters apart. What happens after two quanta of time? Either the bodies have interpenetrated each other by 1 meter, or they have bounced off each other, reversing velocity without ever coming into contact. Both options are unacceptable.

Finally, a theory of discrete time would still involve an unacceptable action at a temporal distance. Something with a power of acting that is actual at time t would have to produce an effect at time $t+1$, even though that power is no longer actual at $t+1$. To make sense of this, we would have to suppose that all earlier times have a higher, more inclusive mode of actuality than later times. As a result, we could not rule out action at extreme temporal distances. But this would contradict one of the most fundamental features of causation: the statistical *screening off* of the remote past by the proximate past (also known as Markov independence—see Pearl 2009, Reichenbach 1956, Suppes 1970). All experimental science presupposes the impossibility of temporally remote direct causation.

Assuming then that time is continuous, we can ask: what explains causally the perpetuation of time through any such continuum of moments? Take a given instant of time t_f. What explains the actualization of this instant, given the infinite density of prior moments of time? Since time is the measure of change, there must be one or more instances of change that require the existence of t_f for their actualization. What is the cause of those changes? Some of these changes may cause others at t_f, but we can identify a class of fundamental changes occurring at t_f, the class C_f, which are not caused by other changes at t_f. (If there were an infinite number of changes occurring at t_f forming an infinite causal regress, we can simply take the aggregate of all such changes and obtain a change without a cause at t_f.) What causes the members of C_f?

We have ruled (by definition) out any actions occurring at t_f as causes of C_f. It is obvious that actions occurring later than t_f cannot cause any of the changes in C_f (or, if that is not obvious, my arguments against actions occurring earlier than t_f can be modified to rule this out). So, there are just two options: the changes in C_f are all caused by actions occurring earlier than t_f, or some at least are caused by some atemporal action (exercised by an atemporal agent).

But actions occurring earlier than t_f cannot cause the changes in C_f, for at least two reasons. First, the actions would lack actuality relative to t_f, and the principle of proportionate causality requires that the actions be actual with respect to the time of the corresponding passions. Second, this would involve causation over a temporal gap, which we have seen can be ruled out on independent grounds. Suppose that an action occurring at t_i was the immediate cause of some of the changes in C_f. (If some events in C_f have causes occurring at earlier times, they must have some immediate causes occurring at earlier times. Mediate causation is only possible by chaining together a finite number of immediate causings.) Let's suppose that entity A_i was the agent of this action at t_i. It is obvious that an event in the past cannot immediately cause an effect in the present. Distance in time rules out immediate causation.

Could the changes in C_f be caused by an infinite plurality of actions P, with the members of P approaching arbitrarily close to the deadline t_f?

In this case, there is no temporal gap between P and C_f to be bridged. However, this suggestion runs into the following problem. Take some action A_i in P and divide P into two parts: those actions occurring before A_i and those occurring simultaneously with A_i or later. Call these parts P_0 and P_1. Clearly, P_0 cannot be directly causally relevant to the occurrence of any of the changes in C_f, given P_1. It can only be indirectly relevant, by virtue of causings in P_1. This is once again a consequence of the screening off of earlier stages by later ones, a Markovian property of causation. The actions in P_1 must be the complete cause of C_f, or else we must again admit some kind of action over a temporal gap (Figure 2.1).

But P is entirely composed of segments that are like P_0 in this respect. Take an infinite series of actions in P that approach closer and closer to t_f. We can use this to define an infinite series of segments of P, each bounded by a successive pair of actions, and none adjacent to t_f, of such a kind that every event in P belongs to one of these segments. We have just seen that none of these segments can be directly connected to C_f, since each is separated from it by a finite temporal gap. But, if P is wholly composed of segments that are not directly connected to C_f, then P itself cannot be directly connected to C_f. This is true even if P is only potentially divisible into these parts.[2] Since P was an arbitrary plurality of this kind, we have shown that no such plurality can be the required cause. Any plurality that is extended over time will be of such a kind that it is entirely composed of segments separated by a temporal gap from C_f, and so no such plurality can be directly connected to it (Figure 2.2).

Here's another way to understand this point. A temporally extended process that does not include any changes at t_f consists entirely of parts
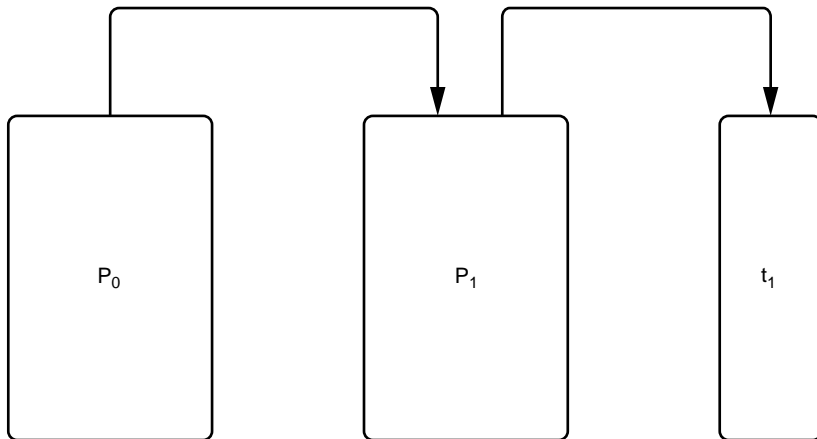

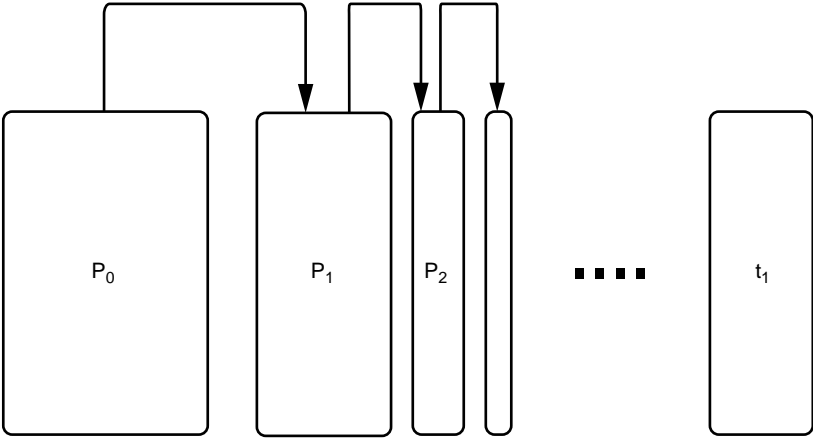*Figure 2.1* An Infinite Plurality of Causings?

Figure 2.2 The Persistence of a Temporal Gap.

that are not actual at t_f. Something entirely composed of things not ac-tual at t_f cannot itself be actual at t_f, and so cannot be causally re-sponsible for any changes then. If one replies that the process as a whole acquires a causal power that is possessed by none of its parts, I can ask in response: *when* does the process acquire this power? If it acquires it before t_f, then it cannot be a power to effect a change at t_f. If it acquires the power at t_f, then this acquisition is itself a change and so part of C_f. It cannot be part of a cause of the members of C_f.

But why, one might ask, couldn't the change at t be the natural result of an infinite number of smaller changes, each occurring before t? Suppose a cylinder is being moved across a finish line, with the first half being across the line at $t - \frac{1}{2}$ second, the next quarter at $t - \frac{1}{4}$ second, and so on. The whole cylinder will be across the line at t, as a result of the accumulation of an infinite series of steps. But the problem is this: why should the final time t arrive at all? Why isn't the infinite series being described merely a potential infinity? Suppose that the first half of the cylinder will cross the finish line this year, the next quarter the following year, and so on. In this case, the cylinder will never cross the line entirely, because there would be no actualization of the series as a whole. The issue in question is this: why do temporally bounded series of this kind always have an actual endpoint?

It is important to recognize that these arguments do not depend on deciding the A Theory/B Theory issue. In particular, they do not depend in any way on so radical a thesis as Presentism—the view that everything that is actual is actual at the present time. It is compatible with these arguments that there are infinitely many different modes of actuality, one for each moment of time, past, present, and future (Koons, 2020;

Koons, forthcoming). All that is required for the argument is the assumption that to effect a change that is actual in mode *t*, the agent must have a power that is actual in that same mode, i.e., at that same time.

The argument would not be consistent with a non-Aristotelian version of the B Theory—one in which every event at every moment of time is actual in exactly the same way. In such a Block Universe model, there is no room for defining change as the actualization of a specific potential. Such a model, as J. M. E. McTaggart (1908) long ago noted, fails to take seriously the reality of change.

I've shown that there must be a timeless agent. What is required for an agent to be timeless? The agent must be not just unchanging but absolutely unchangeable. A changeable but unchanging agent is still an agent whose states are located within time, since such an agent would be in a state of *rest* at each moment of time. If such an agent were to act at more than one moment of time, it would have to change from being inactive to being active, and so could not be unchanging. Only an absolutely unchangeable agent can act at various instants of time without existing within those moments. An agent is absolutely unchangeable only if it has no passive potentiality whatsoever. If it had some potentiality for passion or change, it would (by definition) not be unchangeable and so would not be atemporal.

Hence, the only possible explanation for the perpetuation of continuous time is the action of a timeless agent. How can a timeless agent produce events in time? I will try to explain that in section 2.5.

What about inertia? Couldn't the phenomenon of inertial change explain the continuous propagation of time? No. Inertial change depends on the passage of time. The law of inertia tells us that a body moving with a certain velocity will continue to move with that same velocity unless acted upon by some force. Having a constant velocity (or even a constant or predictable set of accelerations) entails that the body will occupy certain positions at certain future times. However, it does not explain why those future times exist. Inertia is a time-dependent phenomenon. It cannot explain the progression of time but only the progression of a body's positions *given* the progression of time.

Why not free will? Spontaneous self-changing? Same problem. The self-changer would have to first be actual at time t_f in order to act spontaneously at that time. To exercise power at time t_f, even power over oneself, one must be fully actual at time t_f. We need something outside of time to explain the arrival of t_f, which is presupposed by any spontaneous action at t_f. Once again, thanks to the principle of ontological proportionality, it is impossible for something merely potential at t_f to actualize itself. A spontaneous being must have its power to act at time t_f actualized before it can exercise that power spontaneously at that time. Note that this argument applies only to temporal spontaneous agents. A timeless spontaneous agent has the power to act at all times, since it is actual without temporal qualification.

The key explanandum of the argument from motion is the passage of time. We need an explanation of what we could call *temporal inertia*. Why does time keep moving forward?

Michael Tooley has proposed (Tooley 1997), relying on the Moving Block Theory of time, that the set of events occurring before t_f is jointly causally responsible for the existence of t_f, but we have seen that this cannot be the case, if causality respects the principle of ontological proportionality, ruling out the possibility of action across a temporal gap. On reflection, it is not surprising that the ultimate explanation of temporal phenomena must be non-temporal.

Defenders of the perennial philosophy must presuppose what has been called recently *existential inertia*—the principle that, if something exists for some period of time bounded by t, and no process of destruction occurs throughout that same period, then the thing must still exist at t. Existential inertia in this sense is not incompatible with the perennial philosophy—it is presupposed by it. In a sense, the first cause is responsible for the existence of each temporal thing at each moment t—but only by virtue of being responsible for the existence of the moment t itself by being the first cause of change at t.[3]

How is secondary causation possible? How can temporal beings cause anything, if a timeless being must be the first cause of all changes at each moment? The timeless first cause is responsible for some first change (*primum mobile*) at each moment of time—perhaps, the motion of photons, or the inertial motion of bodies. The causally primary changes at each point in time can trigger simultaneous actions at that time by temporal agents existing then. The primary motion at each instant t caused by the first cause actualizes at t the existential inertia of created things, thereby actualizing their potential to act at t in producing new effects. The first cause is not directly responsible for all changes, but only for the causally primary ones.

2.2 Argument for an Absolutely First Cause

We really want a stronger causal principle than the modest claim that all actual changes must have actual causes. We should extend the principle to cover some facts that are not changes—at least, some basic, positive facts.[4] I want to know, for example, that all my current memory impressions have causes—that none of them exist without any cause at all, but memory impressions are states of being, not changes. If it were possible for some of my memories to exist uncaused, then it would be possible for all of them to be uncaused, which would have disastrous epistemological consequences, forcing me to take seriously a global skepticism about the past.[5]

What we need is a version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, a principle asserting that all the members of some wide class of facts

and pluralities[6] of facts have suitable explanations. We shouldn't assume that absolutely all pluralities of facts have a noncircular explanation, since we can show that the plurality of *all the facts there are* cannot be explained by anything that isn't already a member of that plurality. But we should get as close to this ideal as possible since it is epistemologically problematic to carve out exceptions to our PSR without independent justification. (See Koons 1997, Pruss 2006 and 2009, Pruss and Rasmussen 2018, Rasmussen 2019.)

The simplest coherent version of the PSR is this: that all actual facts and pluralities of facts that *possibly* have a cause *actually* do so. The only exceptions that this version of the PSR allows are facts that are intrinsically uncausable (as a matter of metaphysical necessity), and that seems to be an eminently sensible class of exceptions. It's no surprise to be told that there is no cause for the intrinsically uncausable.

Given that there are actual facts, including some basic, positive facts, this PSR enables us to infer the existence of one or more first causes, facts that are intrinsically uncausable and that collectively cause all of the causable facts.

Here's how the proof goes:

1 There are basic, positive facts.
2 Let C be the plurality of all the basic, positive facts that are causable.
3 If every member of a plurality of facts can be caused, then the whole plurality can be jointly caused.
4 Therefore, C is jointly causable. (From 1, 2, and 3)
5 Every plurality that is jointly causable has an actual cause consisting of one or more basic, positive facts (PSR).
6 Therefore, C has an actual cause (or plurality of causes), G, that consists of basic, positive facts. (From 4 and 5)
7 If a plurality A is an actual joint cause of plurality B, then no member of B is a member of A. (The separateness of causes from effects)
8 Therefore, none of the members of G are members of C. (From 6 and 7)
9 Therefore, there is at least one actual, uncausable, basic, positive fact, and some plurality of these facts is the joint cause of all the causable facts C. (From 2, 6, and 8)

There is good reason to think that any wholly contingent basic fact is causable. If a fact F is contingent, then it fails to obtain in some possible world. Consider such a world w_1. Now consider a world w_2 just like w_1 except that we add an entity with the causal power to produce fact F. Then further consider a world w_3 just like w_2 except that that entity actually exercises this power. This world w_3 will be one in which F is caused. By similar reasoning, we could show that any plurality of positive, wholly contingent facts is capable of having a joint cause.

This argument depends on a plausible subtraction principle: if every member of a plurality of basic, positive facts is contingent, then we can, starting with any given world, find a second world from which that entire plurality has been subtracted. This seems plausible, even if the plurality of facts extends infinitely far into the past.[7]

Once armed with a subtraction principle of this kind, we can give another argument in favor of the existence of a necessary being, as noted in unpublished work by Daniel Bonevac (2021), an argument inspired by Aquinas's Third Way. It is plausible that a fact is possible relative to a possible world only if there exists something in that world with the potential of making that fact actual. So, if a basic, positive fact F is contingent in the actual world, then it is not actual in some possible world w_1. Assuming the B axiom of modal logic (equivalent to assuming that relative possibility is symmetric), this means that F is possible in w_1, which entails that some agent A (or plurality of agents) in world w_1 has the power of making F actual. If we reached w_1 by using the subtraction principle, it follows that A is actual in the actual world. So, every contingent fact (or plurality of facts) is such that there are some things in the actual world with the power to make them actual.

Consider now the plurality of all basic, positive facts in the actual world that are contingent. There must exist agent N in the actual world with the power of causing all those contingent facts to be actual. Since no agent can cause its own existence, the existence of agent N cannot be a contingent fact. So, N exists necessarily.

But does this necessarily existing agent exist timelessly (characteristic 2), lacking all passive potentiality (characteristic 3)? I will argue that the answer must be Yes.

First, I will need the concept of a *logical moment*. If agent A causes some effect E, then we can identify two logical moments, even if the action and the effect are temporally simultaneous. If agent A causes E, then agent A acts at one logical moment M_1, and the effect is first in actuality at a posterior moment M_2. The relation of priority/posteriority between logical moments is transitive and asymmetric. No logical moment is prior to itself, and no moment is prior to any moment that is prior to it.

We have proven that there are absolutely uncaused facts. These facts must belong to logical moments that are absolutely primal—i.e., logical moments that are posterior to no logical moments.

Second, I need the concept of a full complement of intrinsic properties. A substance x has a *full complement* of intrinsic properties at moment N with respect to its nature if and only if every property P is such that, if x has P intrinsically at some logical moment in some possible world, then x has either P or its negation intrinsically at N with respect to its nature.

Now I'm in a position to propose a basic principle about causality:

> **The Completeness of Agents (COA).** Necessarily, if agent x acts at logical moment M to produce some effect, then x has a full complement of intrinsic properties at M with respect to its nature.

The rationale for COA is this: in order to act at a logical moment, an agent must actually exist in that moment. But an agent cannot actually exist at a moment without possessing a full complement of properties at that moment. If it didn't possess such a full complement, it would fall short of actuality and would thereby be disqualified from acting.

I need one further principle:

> **The Groundedness of Contingent Intrinsic Properties (GCIP).** Necessarily, if an individual x with essential nature E has an intrinsic property P contingently at logical moment M with respect to nature E, then there are some properties Q_1 through Q_n such that: x's being P at M is wholly grounded[8] by x's being E and x's having Q_1 through Q_n at M, and for each Q_i, x's having Q_i at M is a basic, positive fact.

In order for a property to be a contingent intrinsic property of a thing with respect to its nature, it must be wholly grounded by some properties, each of which is a determinate of some determinable property that is essential to that thing. A thing can't just take on intrinsic properties willy-nilly.[9] A basic intrinsic property must fulfill some essential role dictated by the thing's nature. The requirements of a thing's nature lay out the possibilities for a thing's intrinsic character.

Let's suppose that God is one of the agents acting at a primal moment M. Suppose for contradiction that God has some intrinsic property P at M contingently with respect to the divine nature.[10] By GCIP, there must be some basic properties Q_1 through Q_n possessed intrinsically by God with respect to the divine nature at M, and God's having P at M is wholly grounded by His having Q_1 through Q_n at M. We can assume that grounding is a necessitation relation. Consequently, God must have at least one property Q_i contingently at M. If He had all of them at M necessarily, then He would have to have P at M necessarily as well.

Since it is a basic, positive, contingent fact that God possesses Q_i at M, then this fact (by the PSR or principle of causality) must have a cause. But that is inconsistent with our assumption that M is a primal moment, and so no fact at M can have a cause.

Hence, God cannot possess any contingent intrinsic properties at the logical moment M.

If it is necessary that God possess P intrinsically at M, there must be some explanation of this necessity. A logical moment is not a thing in its own right but simply a node in the causal network of the world.

So, if it is necessary that God possess P intrinsically at *M*, this must be a result of God's essence, and a result of God's essence alone, since there are no prior facts to appeal to. But if God's possessing P is a result of God's essence alone, then He must possess P necessarily at every logical moment in every possible world, and not just at *M*.

If we suppose that God has, by virtue of His nature, some intrinsic property P in primal moment *M* in our possible world but some contrary property Q in other primal moments in other worlds, then we would need an explanation of why it was *M* rather than some other primal moment that was actual, and this will again contradict that supposition that *M* is truly primal (uncaused). Alternatively, if we suppose that it is somehow part of God's nature that God has some intrinsic property P at every primal moment in every possible world, but God nonetheless has contrary properties at other moments in some possible worlds, we would want to know *why* God's essence requires that particular property P in the primal moments instead of some other property equally compatible with God's nature. We would have to accept a brute necessity, an arbitrary constraint on the space of possibility.

Tim O'Connor has suggested (in private communication) this reply: "God's possible contrary properties at other logic moments are necessarily consequent on God's engagement with a contingent creation; God's invariant nature in primal moments across worlds reflects the fact that God is the absolute source of all contingent truth." But, on this picture, what accidents does God have in the primal moment? All the properties He would have in a world in which He creates nothing at all? Surely not, for in those worlds God knows in the primal moment that He will not create anything.[11] Or does He know then that He has not yet made up His mind as to what to create in a still open future? How does God's essence determine that He must begin in such a state of indecision and ignorance of the future? If it does, could He remain forever in such a state?

Remember, the crucial point about God's state in the primal moment is not its metaphysical necessity but its uncausability. Any intrinsic state that is changeable is in principle causable. So, God's state at the primal moment must consist entirely of unchangeable properties. If God's state in the primal moment were changeable, then He could be in that very same state in some non-primal moment, and His being in such a state in such a moment could have a causal explanation.

Suppose that God has an intrinsic property P at some logical moment *N* in some possible world. Since God has a full complement of properties at the primal moment *M*, God must either have P or its negation at *M*. From the argument just given, it follows that God *qua* God must have P necessarily at *all* logical moments in all possible worlds. Hence, God has all His intrinsic properties necessarily at every logical moment.

Here's another way to look at this. Why can't God *lack* some intrinsic property P at primal moment *M*, such that God could *gain* P in some

subsequent logical moment? For a thing x to lack a possible intrinsic property is for it to have an intrinsic character of a certain kind. This intrinsic character must be a positive fact about x. Either the absence of P is grounded by x's having some contrary intrinsic property Q, or else there is some *totality property*[12] T of x that encompasses the fact that x's total complement of intrinsic properties does *not* include P. In either case, there is a basic, positive fact about x that must be causally explained (given the PSR). When God lacks a particular intrinsic property (with respect to His divine nature), this absence is not a mere absence but a kind of *privation*. Accidental privations that are not necessitated by a thing's essence are causable facts, and so the PSR requires that they all have actual causes (see Haldane 2007). Consequently, God cannot have (*qua* God) any accidental privations of this kind in the primal moment M. It is not possible for Him to subsequently gain intrinsic properties in His divine nature, since He has with necessity a full complement of intrinsic properties at that primal moment.

Since God has every intrinsic property essentially, He must be a being of pure actuality, with no passive potentiality (characteristic 3). Consequently, He must be timeless (characteristic 2).

This sort of argument from contingency has often been challenged by the prospect of a modal collapse (Ross 1969, 295–304; van Inwagen, 1993, 202–4). That is, if everything is fully caused by a necessary being, won't that make every fact necessary? How can there be any contingency in such a world?

The standard classical-theist response is simply to deny that complete cause or causal explanation must necessitate its effect. In her inaugural lecture at Cambridge, Elizabeth Anscombe (1981) pointed out that there is a clear difference between uncaused and undetermined (or unnecessitated). Probabilistic causation in quantum physics provides us with many plausible cases of causes that do not necessitate. A quantum experiment can cause an electron to appear in the left half of a screen, even if the same experimental conditions could have caused the same electron to appear on the right half of the screen. Libertarian free will provides more plausible cases like this. An agent with free will can cause himself to walk on the left side of the street, even if he had the power and equally good reasons for walking on the right side instead. In the same way, the necessary first agent can cause a contingent world of a certain kind to exist, even if it was possible for the agent to actualize any of an infinite number of alternative possibilities.

Does this mean that we lack complete, contrastive explanations—i.e., explanations of why the free agent chose to go left *rather than* right? This depends on exactly what we require of complete and contrastive explanations. If we require them to *necessitate* their explananda, then, yes, we must give up the notion that such explanations always exist. However, we can still find contrastive but non-necessitating explanations. If the free

agent freely chose to go to the left, he had good reasons for going to the left rather than the right, and equally good reasons for going to the right rather than the left. We can appeal to the former to offer a complete explanation of the fact that he chose to go to the left rather than the right, just as we could have appealed to the latter to offer a complete explanation of the fact that he chose to go to the right rather than the left, if he had in fact chosen to do so.

2.3 Argument for a Being of Pure Existence

Let's consider necessary beings again. Couldn't some necessary beings be causable? That is, couldn't some necessary beings be eternally and necessarily caused by something else? If that were the case, these dependent necessary beings wouldn't be necessary in and of themselves (*per se*). They would have a derived necessity that depends on the necessity of some other necessary being.

What if the dependent necessary beings formed an infinite causal regress? At this point we have to distinguish between accidentally and essentially infinite regresses. As I interpret the distinction, it is a distinction between two kinds of infinite causal regresses: those that are essentially infinite, and those that are merely accidentally infinite. In an accidentally infinite causal series, each member of the series is of the same kind. For example, if each human being had an infinite number of ancestors, then the infinite regress of generations would be only accidentally infinite, since each generation consists of the same kind of entity, namely, human beings. An accidentally infinite series offers no explanation at all of why there exist any members of that kind, since each link in the series presupposes that fact. The members of an accidentally infinite series can be aggregated into a single plurality, and we can then insist upon identifying a joint cause of the whole plurality. This would have to be a timeless cause of the existence of all of the infinitely many generations of human beings.

An essentially infinite regress, in contrast, offers at each step a real, noncircular explanation of why we have actual members of the kind involved in the next step. So, for example, suppose we explained the existence of human beings in terms of the existence of planets, and planets in terms of the existence of stars, and stars in terms of the existence of gas clouds, and so on, ad infinitum. It is not nearly so obvious that such an infinite series of categorically different facts would have to have a joint cause.

An accidentally infinite series of necessary beings would pose no problem since we could then aggregate all of the dependent necessary beings into a single totality and ask, What is the cause of its necessity? This would get us to at least one being with independent, uncaused necessity.

But what about the possibility of an essentially infinite regress? The tradition, beginning with Aristotle, is unanimous in considering such a thing impossible, but I will proceed more cautiously here. We can note that positing an essentially infinite regress comes at a very high theoretical cost: we would have to postulate an infinite number of distinct degrees or modes of necessity, each dependent on all of the "higher" modes. In fact, we might argue that such a situation is impossible. All of the supposed infinity of degrees or modes of necessity are all degrees or modes of the same thing, namely, *necessity*. They must be related to one another by *analogy*, to use the technical Aristotelian term. But what makes them all modes of the same thing? The standard answer is this: whenever we have a plurality of properties that bear some analogy to one another, there must be some single anchor property: one that is principally and focally what all of the others are in some derived way. If so, this principal mode of necessity would be a regress stopper, giving us once again a being that is independently and uncausably necessary.

Here's a second, independent argument against the regress. Let's suppose for contradiction that there is an infinite regress of necessary beings, each of which derives its necessity from its predecessor. So, N_1 is caused to be necessary by N_2, N_2 is caused to be necessary by N_3, and so on. And let's assume that all necessary beings belong to such a regress: nothing is necessary in and of itself (unconditionally). Now, a world in which none of N_1, N_2, N_3, etc. exist is an impossible world, since each of these beings exists necessarily and so exists in every possible world. So, the scenario in which none of the N's exist is an "impossible world," if you'll allow me to talk of it that way. Let's call this impossible world w_I.

Let's assume that if a scenario S is impossible, and this scenario S can be derived from some possible world w simply by *deleting* entities that exist in w, then there must be some ground or explanation of S's impossibility. Let's stipulate that the impossible world w_I comes from the actual world (which is possible) by deleting all of the conditionally necessary beings in the actual world. Then the impossibility of w_I must be explained in one of two ways: it fails to include something that is unconditionally necessary, or it violates some constraint of conditional necessity, i.e., it contains A but not B, even though A would (if it existed) necessitate B's existence (which it could do by necessitating B's necessary existence). But w_I is not impossible in either of these ways. There is (by hypothesis) no unconditionally necessary being, so it isn't impossible for that reason. And it satisfies all of the conditional constraints by never including any of the N's. Its noninclusion of N_i is permissible because it also fails to include $N_{(i+1)}$, and N_i is necessary only conditional on $N_{(i+1)}$'s existence. So, w_I is possible, after all, which means that none of the N's is necessary. Contradiction.

Therefore, it is impossible for anything to be necessary unless something is necessary unconditionally. And to be necessary unconditionally

is to be necessary in and of oneself. And such a being would have to be absolutely uncausable in its existence.

Aquinas's next claim is this: a being of pure existence, i.e., an entity that is identical to its own act of existence, is the only kind of being that would be intrinsically uncausable (*De Ente*, chapter 2, par. 80). Hence, there must be such a being (characteristic 4). Moreover, such a being will also have the other three basic characteristics of the God of classical theism.

Aquinas's theory of *esse* (existence) and *actus essendi* (acts of existence) is a substantive metaphysical proposal, not merely an analysis of ordinary language and thought. Aquinas is offering an interesting and attractive theory about actuality, something that philosophers have wrestled with from antiquity to the present time. How are my actual daughters different from all the possible but not actual daughters that I could have had but didn't? There have been relatively few accounts of this fact in the history of philosophy:

A   *Actualism*. There is no such thing as a *non-actual daughter*. Talk about such things must be paraphrased as talk about our ideas or suppositions.
B   *Mysterious Quality*. There is a special, ineffable quality that all and only actual things have.
C   *Kantianism*. To be actual is to be connected in appropriate ways to sensations (as opposed to acts of imagination or supposition).
D   *Leibnizian Optimism*. To be actual is to be a denizen of the best possible world.
E   *Centrality*. To be actual is to belong to the central portion of reality, upon which all merely potential realities depend (by being related to the powers or dispositions of actual things). (Koons and Pickavance 2018)
F   *Divine Causality*. To be actual is to be caused to exist by the absolutely necessary being (Robert M. Adams)
G   *Thomism*. To be actual is to contain an act of existence (*actus essendi*). These acts of existence are all exactly the same, with one exception—all but God are cases of participated existence, while God is the unique case of unparticipated existence.

It's easy to dispose of options B, C, and D. We have no acquaintance with any actual-ish quality, and even if we did, it would be easy to conceive of nonactual things with that quality (disposing of B). To make B work, we would have to suppose that there is a quality of ordinary objects that can only be found in actual situations—that could never be merely possibly instantiated by anything. That is contrary to the very notion of a quality. Kant's attempted definition ignores the fact that it is only actual sensations that are relevant to the actuality of a physical

thing, rendering his definition of 'actual' viciously circular (disposing of C). Being part of the best possible world intuitively has nothing to do with being actual. If God chooses to make the best possible world actual, He must do something. Being best isn't sufficient to make it actual on its own (disposing of D).

I don't think E is really a competitor with G. Necessary beings (like God) are essentially "central" in this way, so E would provide some basis for identifying God as actual. However, many actual things are contingent. This means that although they are in fact metaphysically central, they could have been peripheral. We still need an explanation of what makes one contingent thing metaphysically central and another peripheral.

Adams's proposal F might be confused with Aquinas's, but I think that it (like Kant's definition C) has a fatal flaw. What matters for actuality is not that God should cause a thing to exist, but that He should *actually cause* that existence. Every possible creature would, if it were to exist, be caused to exist by God. And, given God's simplicity (His lack of accidents and passive potentiality), what God actually does cannot depend on God's internal state. And even if (*per impossibile*) it did depend on that state, it would depend on God's *actual* state, not on some merely possible one. So, we are still left with no account of what makes the difference between actuality and mere possibility.

So, that leaves only A and G. Aristotelians will reject A (actualism) on the ground that it denies the metaphysical significance of the actuality/potentiality distinction. If everything nonactual is completely unreal, then we face the Parmenidean problem of explaining how substantial change (generation and corruption of substances in nature) is possible. Even more importantly, we cannot treat active powers or passive potencies to change as aspects of reality. If something has the potential to become hot, for example, this consists in the thing's having a real relation to a merely potential accident of heat. If there are no merely potential entities, then we would have to embrace some form of Platonic realism, understanding the potentiality for heat as a relation to the universal idea of Heat Itself.

Aquinas postulates that everything created *receives* its existence through its form. Thus, for Socrates to exist, existence must come to Socrates through his form of humanity. Consequently, Socrates cannot exist without being a living human being. Thus, for Socrates, to be is to be human, a living human being. However, Aquinas's theory is that this is true only of creatures. God does not *receive* His existence from anything. Consequently, it does not have to come to Him through any limiting form. His existence is simple, unqualified, and unlimited. For God to be is simply for God to be, full stop.

Alex Pruss has made (in conversation) the following objection (which he doesn't ultimately endorse). Acts of existence can't explain the

difference between actuality and mere potentiality, because it is only *actually existent* acts of existence that can do this. We would need an explanation of the difference between actual acts of existence and merely possible ones, and so the former would need their own acts of existence, *ad infinitum*.

The Thomist's answer should be that there are two ways that things can exist in actuality: the way in which acts of existence do, and the way in which everything else does. In the latter case, things exist by having acts of existence. An act of existence just is *simpliciter*. With respect to acts of existence, we should be strict actualists (option A). Absolutely nothing is a *merely possible* act of existence. We don't countenance nonexisting acts of existence in our domain of discourse.

Isn't this inconsistent? If we can take the actualist line (option A) for acts of existence, why can't we do so for all entities? The reason is that we don't need merely possible acts of existence to make sense of all nonactual possibilities, but we do need merely possible entities of every other kind. We need merely possible substances, merely possible accidents, merely possible forms, and merely possible matter. Without all of these things, we cannot account for the internal structure of mere possibilities. However, we never need merely possible acts of existence. They are needed only at the final stage to distinguish one possibility (the actual one) from all others.

If we think of essences as representing the potential existence of something, and the act of existence as the actuality of that potential, then essences must be thought of as passively receiving existence from something else. Since a thing can't exist until its essence has received such existence, nothing of this sort could be uncaused. Therefore, since the necessary first cause is uncaused, its essence cannot receive existence. So, it could exist only if its essence already *was* an act of existence.

Of course, this presupposes that we have accepted the proposal that essences are potentialities for existence. This turns, I think, on seeing Thomas's theory of acts of existence as a theory of actuality. It is acts of existence that actualize possibilities. Mere essences, *sans* such acts, are thus mere potentialities for existence.

Aquinas has a second strategy for demonstrating that God is identical to His own act of existence. First, he shows that God's essence is identical to His act of existence, and then he shows that, given this identity, God himself must be identical to His act of existence/essence. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.22, paragraph 2, Aquinas argues for the first identity in the following way. First, he shows that God's essence must be compatible with existence. Consequently, Aquinas argues, if God's essence is not identical to His own act of existence, then there are just three alternatives: either God's existence depends on His essence, or both depend on some third thing, or the essence must depend on the existence. One might push back here: why couldn't both the existence and essence

be independent, uncaused things? Or why couldn't they be *inter-dependent* things, with the existence depending on the essence for its form, and the essence on the existence for its actuality? Inter-dependent things must be at least partially independent—the essence being what it is independent of the act of existence, and the act of existence having its actuality independent of the essence. If two partially independent things become intertwined, we can ask for the cause of the intertwining. But if God's existence is uncaused, and His existence and essence are distinct entities, there could be no such cause.

If God's existence depended on His essence or on some third thing, then God's existence couldn't be uncaused. There's an independent reason for thinking that His existence cannot depend on His essence: no essence can cause or ground the actual existence of something except by being actualized by an act of existence. Essences *sans* existence dwell in a realm of pure potentiality. So the case to consider is that in which God's essence depends on His existence. Here again, we have to turn to the actuality/potentiality distinction. If essence and act of existence are distinct, then the act of existence must actualize the possibility represented by the essence. The act of existence cannot both bring into being a possibility and then actualize that same possibility. An act of existence cannot do anything prior to its actualizing of an essence—it is only after actualizing an essence that it can be said to have a nature that could bring about anything. Since this is impossible, God's essence must be identical to His act of existence.

Given this identity, it is easy to see that God himself must be identical to His act of existence. At any primal moment of God's time, every feature of God, whether essential or accidental, must be immediately actualized by His act of existence. Since His act of existence is identical to His essence, this means that every feature of God at the primal moment is immediately actualized by His essence. By definition, an accident is a feature that is not immediately actualized by a thing's essence. So, God cannot have any accidents at any primal moment. A being with no accidents is identical to its own essence. So, God is identical at the primal moment to His own essence and, consequently, to His own act of existence. Since God has no accidents then, He cannot acquire any later (qua God), and so God is always identical to His own act of existence.

Does this definition of God as pure existence open the door to St. Anselm's ontological proof? No, we cannot prove that God exists simply by defining Him in terms of existence. We cannot know, by definition alone, whether a being actually exists that is identical to its own act of existence. We cannot even know in that way that such a being is possible. The existence of such a being must be proved by first proving the existence of an uncausable first cause, and then by showing that such an uncausable being must be identical to its own act of existence.

We can also see why it is not sufficient for God's essence to *include* or *entail* His existence, without simply *being* His act of existence. If God's act of existence were merely a *part* of His essence, then we would still need a causal explanation for the actual combination of His act of existence with the rest of His essence. In addition, we would have to ask which is ontologically prior, God's essence or His act of existence? Either answer would lead to a contradiction.

Once again, we can see that God must lack all passive potentialities. Any passive potentiality would be the potentiality for an accidental feature, since nothing has the potentiality to lack any of its essential features. But God has no accidents. So, He cannot have any passive potentialities, either (characteristic 3). And, a being without passive potentialities unchangeable and thus timeless (characteristic 2).

There is a unique first cause of all causable things, and this first cause must be absolutely uncausable. Only a being that is identical to its own act of existence is absolutely uncausable. So, God must also be the absolutely first cause of all causable things (characteristic 1).

2.4 Infinity, Perfection, and Unity of the First Cause

Aquinas insists that God's existence is not the greatest-common-factor kind of existence that is common to every actual thing (SCG I.26, and *De Ente et Essentia*, par. 90). That kind of generic existence is shared by both God and creatures—in God it is unlimited, in creatures it is limited by essence. God's existence is the sort that is incompatible with any kind of limitation or restriction.

An act of existence must give whatever actuality a thing has. Hence, acts of existence, as such, are infinite, while all substances and accidents are finite. If acts of existence as such were finite in any way, then there would be possible entities that could not be actualized. But that is a contradiction in terms: to be a possible entity is to be possibly actualized. Hence, acts of existence must have the power to actualize everything, to the outermost limits of possibility. They must be intrinsically infinite.

Furthermore, if any act of existence were finite as an individual, then this finitude would define a particular kind of being. In other words, the act of existence would have a kind of essence built into it. But if the act includes such an essence, then it would make sense for the act to exist only in potentiality. But, as we've seen, this is impossible. Every act of existence must be actual.

Finally, existence itself can have no limit, since a limit implies some possible thing beyond the limit, but nothing can exist "outside" of existence. A limit is something that receives existence, and that limits the existence it receives. Existence itself cannot be or have a limit.

God is a pure act of existence, without any associated essence. Hence, God is absolutely infinite. He must possess every possible perfection without any limit whatsoever.

Is there one God or many? In *Summa Theologiae* Part I, Question 11, article 3, Thomas offers three arguments for the oneness of God. The first argument appeals to God's simplicity. God is made to be God by His divine nature, and that divine nature also makes Him exist as a particular being. For there to be two gods, there would have to be two divine natures, each of the same species. But for two natures to exist with the same species, there would have to be something responsible for making each distinct from the other. So, for example, two men can be two by virtue of being combined with two packets of prime matter.[13] Two packets of prime matter have no actual nature of their own, and so they can be fundamentally or primitively distinct. The divine nature is an actual nature (it is maximally actual), and so two divine natures cannot be fundamentally distinct. Since God is identical to His own nature, there cannot be two instances of the divine nature, just as there cannot be two instances of a single angelic species.

In the second argument, Thomas appeals to the infinity of God's perfection, by which he means that nothing can be superior to God in perfection. Suppose that there were two such maximally perfect beings. In this argument, Thomas concedes (for the sake of argument) that there could be two distinct species of god. If there were two such species, something would have to differentiate them. One would have to have something that the other did not have. But this means that one would have to have some form of perfection that was lacking in the other. But God has all perfections.

Third, Thomas appeals to the apparent unity of the world. This is one of the relatively few cases in which Thomas appeals to some form of the Fifth Way—pointing to God as the cause of the world's systematic harmony, the fact that the active and passive powers of the world's created substances fit together in order to make a stable, scientifically intelligible universe. Thomas gives a more detailed version of this argument in *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.42, paragraph 7.

It is clear that a being of pure existence, one identical to its own essence and its own act of existence, will lack proper parts. God can have no parts accidentally since He has no accidents at all. He cannot have parts essentially, since, if He did, His essence would be in part constituted by those parts and their essential inter-relations. Such an essence could not be identical to a simple act of existence.

Is this compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity? Yes, since any orthodox version of that doctrine will deny that the three Persons are mere parts of God. In fact, I have argued that an orthodox version of the Trinity requires the classical-theist conception of God. (Koons 2018; see also Chapter 15 in this volume)

2.5 Intelligence in the First Cause

Is the God of classical theism a personal being? In particular, is He intelligent? Does He know and understand things? We can answer Yes for a number of reasons.

First, as we have seen, God enjoys the infinite perfection of being. If being intelligent and knowledgeable is a fundamental and real form of being, and one that does not entail any limitation or privation, then God must be intelligent and knowledgeable. I will assume here that intelligence is real and irreducible (see Koons and Bealer 2010). Being intelligent and knowledgeable does not, in and of themselves, entail any limitation or imperfection.

Second, God is the timeless cause of all temporal change. This raises the specter of Al-Ghazali's objection to a timeless cause: if the cause is eternal, why isn't the effect equally eternal? We know from experience only two kinds of causes: personal and impersonal. An impersonal cause cannot impose temporal structure on its effect. Consequently, Al-Ghazali is right about any timeless impersonal cause: such a cause could only have timeless effects.

However, we know that minds can create temporal order. In fact, minds are the only known cause of temporal series. Consider the way in which an author (like J. R. R. Tolkien) is able to create and impose an alien temporal structure on his story, or the way in which a musical composer does on his composition. It makes no sense to ask whether Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Ring*s before, during, or after the Second Age of Middle Earth, or whether Beethoven composed the Ninth Symphony before, during, or after the second movement. Human minds can create structures that have their own temporal order, one that is separate and distinct from the temporal characteristics of the creator's own actions. In an analogous way, a personal, timeless Creator can impose temporal structure on His creation.

Third, we know that God has the power to cause the existence of every possible kind of creature. An immaterial substance can have an active power (like the power to cause things' existence) only through the capacity for understanding and will. The forms of all possible creatures must pre-exist somehow in God. They cannot exist in God "naturally," in the sense that God could actualize each of the forms in His own person, since many of the forms are mutually incompatible. Nothing can be black and white, or a blue whale and a daffodil. So, they must exist in God in some kind of "intentional" (non-natural way). And we could plausibly define *understanding* as simply being a thing that contains forms intentionally.

But what about unintelligent, material substances that have active powers? Take, for example, the sun's power of heating the surface of the earth. In the Fifth Way, Thomas Aquinas argues that such active powers

cannot exist in unintelligent bodies except instrumentally, by virtue of existing primarily in some intelligent maker or user of the unintelligent thing. So, perhaps we could define understanding in this way:

- Substance x *understands* form F if and only if F exists in x intentionally and intrinsically (not by virtue of x's being an instrument of some other substance).

And we could define 'intentional' existence of a form in a substance thus:

- Form F exists *intentionally* in substance x if and only F exists in x in some mode M such that it does not follow with metaphysical necessity that: if some form G exists in some substance y in mode M, then G can be predicated truthfully of y.

Given these definitions, we can prove that God understands every form that could possibly exist in any substance. Note that this argument relies both on God's unity and on His status as the necessary first cause of everything else.

2.6 The God of the Bible

Is the God of the philosophers identical to the God of the Bible? I will not address here the question of whether there are inconsistencies between the two accounts—I will leave those questions to other contributors. So, assuming that the God of classical theism exists and that the characteristics of the God of classical theism are consistent with characteristics attributed to God in the Bible, should we identify the two? Surely under those conditions the identification would be irresistible. If the God of the Bible were not identical to the God of classical theism, He would have to be a creature of that God, and that is surely incompatible with the Biblical account, as well as with the ecumenical creeds. A mere creature would not be maximally great or worthy of worship, even if it existed eternally.

But are the characteristics of the God of classical theism compatible with those of the God of the Bible? The greatest point of tension concerns God's love and concern for creatures. The God of the Bible has freely chosen to create the world. So, every creature exists contingently. God knows and loves each creature. Yet, the God of classical theism is in exactly the same intrinsic state in every possible world. How then can He know, love, and respond to contingently existing creatures?

A couple of critical points. First of all, in Aristotle's metaphysical system, the action of an agent is wholly located in the patient. An agent *qua* agent is not modified by acting—only the patient need to be modified. Consequently, the truthmaker for each of God's contingent actions

is the contingent fact that He causes. No internal modification of God's being is required. Second, God's knowledge and concern do not require internal representations in the way that our intentional states do. God does not have to re-present external things to Himself. They are immediately present to His mind. He does not have to calculate, infer, reason, or deliberate, since He grasps all truths, both necessary and contingent, by a single, simple act of cognition (an act that is intrinsically unvarying across possible worlds).

Does this make God somehow cognitively or phenomenologically "blind"? How could God's phenomenology include an attitude of love toward a particular creature, if God's intrinsic state is invariant? This assumes that the phenomenology of God's consciousness depends only on His intrinsic state. Many recent philosophers of mind (the semantic "externalists") have denied that this is true, even in the case of human consciousness. We can suppose that God's phenomenology varies independently of His intrinsic state, depending in part on the world that He in fact creates and sustains.

There is one important qualification. The God of the Christian Bible has assumed (in the person of the Son) a created human nature, with the result that the Son is both God and man. Could the God of the Bible undergo such a transformation? Again, I will leave this question to Timothy Pawl (Chapter 16), but I will here say only that classical theism is committed only to the thesis that God *qua* God possesses each of the four characteristics and all their logical corollaries. Given that God has assumed a created nature, there are things that are true of God but not true of God *qua* God.

Notes

1 I want to thank Tim O'Connor, Christopher Tomaszewski, and Dan Bonevac for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
2 This is in fact the view Aristotelians should take of continuous processes, in order to avoid Zeno's paradox of the stadium. Only a finite number of events within any process are fully actual—the rest exist as mere potentialities, liable to becoming actual if the process were to be interrupted at the corresponding point in time. But mere potentialities existing before t_f clearly lack the ontological status of being able to cause a change in C_f, for two reasons: the temporal gap, and their status as mere potentialities.
3 In light of the theory of relativity, we can suppose that the instants of time are in some sense localized in space as well. Consequently, God can annihilate an individual substance by simply refraining from actualizing the relevant instant in the substance's local timeline.
4 By *basic, positive facts* I mean the existence of substances and accidents (the ten categories of things in Aristotle's ontology). This term excludes negative facts (mere absences), as well as logically complex facts like disjunctions or generalizations. All logically complex propositions are made true or false by the existence or nonexistence of such basic, positive facts, so these are the sorts of things that require causal explanation.

5 See (Koons and Pruss 2021) for arguments for the claim that denying the PSR leads to global skepticism.

6 A *plurality* of facts is my way of referring to *some facts*, taken collectively. The term 'plurality' looks singular, but it is actually a plural noun, referring to many facts at once. (British English respects this feature of collective nouns by combining them with verbs in the plural form: e.g., 'the committee have decided'. For a discussion of plural reference, see Boolos 1984.) I am not assuming that any plurality of facts forms a single, composite fact, but I am assuming that we seek causal explanations for pluralities of facts as well as for individual facts. An ordinary collection of ordinary facts, even if infinite, should have a joint cause (which might be a plurality of causes).

7 Tim O'Connor (personal communication 2021) has pointed out that, if theism is true, then the necessary existence of God might ground exceptions to the subtraction principle. If so, the argument could be reconstructed as a *reductio ad absurdum* of atheism.

8 This is intended to be what is called 'weak grounding'—I want to allow for the case in which x's. being P is itself a basic, positive fact, in which case this fact weakly grounds itself.

9 As I will explain in Section 6, God's assuming of a created nature (like Jesus' humanity) is an exception to this rule. But it remains true that God *qua God* cannot have any intrinsic properties that are not grounded by some part of a nature-constituted disjunction.

10 Note that this argument does not rule out God's having contingent intrinsic properties with respect to other natures, such as an assumed human nature. This renders the account compatible with a Chalcedonian doctrine of the Incarnation.

11 Here I am making a false assumption, for the sake of an *ad hominem* argument against the critic: namely, I am assuming that the different possible contents of God's decision of what to create and whether to create correspond to different intrinsic properties of God's mind.

12 A totality property is a constituent of what David M. Armstrong (1997) called *totality facts*. A totality fact about some particular substance would entail that the substance lacks any intrinsic property not contained in some totality C. Totality facts are basic, positive facts that ground truths about privations.

13 Thomas says that it is "designated" or "signate" matter that individuates. I take 'signate matter' to refer to what I am calling "packets" of prime matter since we are able to refer to such packets only via their spatiotemporal locations. Nonetheless, the distinctness of two packets of prime matter is metaphysically prior to the distinctness of spatiotemporal locations.

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3 Some Arguments for Divine Simplicity

Alexander R. Pruss

3.1 Introduction

The doctrine of divine simplicity has historically been found both in Christianity[1] and Judaism: God has no proper parts or proper constituents. The doctrine embodies the wonder of monotheism: there is a truly *single* entity at the heart of all reality. Maimonides (1904, Part I, chapter 50) bitingly remarked that someone who denies divine simplicity violates monotheism just as much as Christian Trinitarians do. While I disagree with him that Christian Trinitarians violate monotheism, I will offer arguments based on fundamental monotheistic ideas that give some weight to Maimonides' claim that monotheism requires the doctrine of divine simplicity. I will also offer one argument based on the New Testament's claim that God is love. A number of times, I will rely on Anselmian perfect being theology in the course of argument.

I defined the doctrine of divine simplicity as a denial of two claims: that God has proper parts and that God has proper constituents, where a *proper* part or constituent is one that is distinct from the whole. Constituents are things like property instances, attributes, or bare particulars that help make up a substance. On some views of the constituency relation, the constituents of a thing are proper parts of it, and on those views, denying that God has proper parts covers all of the doctrine of divine simplicity.

In the first major section of the paper, I offer a number of arguments that God has no proper parts. In the second, I offer arguments that God is identical with his attribute instances, such as God's love, God's wisdom, and so on. Since attribute instances are some of the most plausible candidates for a divine constituent that is distinct from God, this provides significant support for the claim that God has no proper constituents. Each argument, of course, can be questioned, but each one raises the probability of divine simplicity, and together they make a strong case.

Before moving on to these analytic arguments, I want to make some personal remarks about the doctrine, which is often felt to be a dry

scholastic complication irrelevant to religious practice. I first met the doctrine of divine simplicity as a teenager, reading the first questions of Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. I found Aquinas' picture of God as a simple and perfectly active being deeply beautiful and devotionally productive. And the sheer beauty of the doctrine is epistemically relevant. Those who share this aesthetic judgment will find in it both an Anselmian perfect being theology argument for the truth of the doctrine (a God who is simple is greater than one who is not) and a pragmatic argument for clergy to preach the doctrine in order to increase appreciation of the glory of God.

Additionally, the transcendence of a simple God and a simple God's radical difference from us provide a powerful answer to the constant criticism that religious people are engaging in illicit anthropomorphism in believing in gods. Indeed, I personally would find it difficult to believe in a God who is not simple, as such a God would feel too much like a fairy tale about an "old man in the sky," even if the non-simple God's parts were non-physical.

At the same time, although I give a number of arguments for divine simplicity, and the overall case resulting from them is compelling, a full evaluation would require looking at arguments against divine simplicity. There are four main such arguments. First, it simply seems very plausible that because mercy and justice in general (and other such pairs of properties) are distinct, God's mercy and God's justice have to be distinct as well, and in particular, at most one of them can be identical with God, contrary to divine attribute instance simplicity: this argument will be briefly discussed at the beginning of Section 3.3. Second and third, it is difficult to see how God can know and how God can will without having contingent constituents such as God's knowledge that there exist cats or God's willing to make mountains. Fourth, the doctrine of the Trinity appears to some to be incompatible with divine simplicity, and if this is true, then it provides Christian theists with an argument against divine simplicity. I believe all such arguments can be answered[2], but readers not convinced may find these considerations to outweigh my arguments for divine simplicity.

3.2 Parts

The concept of a part is likely one of those basic concepts that cannot be defined, though examples can be given. While physical parts, such as arms and legs, are the most obvious examples of parts, philosophers have theorized about non-physical parts as well. Thus, Plato talks of three parts of an immaterial soul, and many dualists think that we have a physical body and an immaterial soul as parts. Works of literature appear to be abstract objects having parts such as chapters, paragraphs, or stanzas. David Lewis (1990) thinks that nonempty sets are wholes

having singleton sets (sets with one member) as parts. And an immaterial object existing in time could have temporal parts or time slices, even though these would not be physical. Insofar as all of this appears to make sense, I take it that our concept of parthood is not tied to the physical, and so parthood simplicity does not just follow from immateriality. Finally, a *proper* part of x is a part of x other than x itself. Parthood simplicity says that God has no proper parts.

We start with a simple argument from God's being a creator.

3.2.1 Creation

The following argument is valid:

1   God is the cause of everything other than himself. (Premise: "the creation doctrine")
2   Nothing that has proper parts is the cause of all of its proper parts. (Premise)
3   All of God's proper parts are other than God. (Definition of "proper part.")
4   If God has proper parts, he is the cause of all his proper parts. [By (1) and (3)]
5   So, God has no proper parts. [By (2) and (4)]

The argument has two premises that aren't obviously true by definition, one about parts and causation and the other about God.

Let's first consider premise (1) that God is the cause of everything other than himself. On its face, the thesis is a central commitment of theism. Moreover, there is a plausible perfect being theology argument for it: a necessary being that essentially is the cause of everything other than itself is greater than a necessary being that isn't essentially the cause of everything other than itself.

Nonetheless, some theists have questioned the formulation of the creation doctrine in (1). The main case is that of abstract objects. Modern Platonists hold that abstract objects exist but do not enter into causal relations.[3] If they do not enter into causal relations, they are not caused by God or anything else.

Some theists are modern Platonists (e.g., van Inwagen 2009), and hence hold that the doctrine that God is the cause of everything other than himself needs to be restricted. This seems to me to be a mistake (cf. Craig 2016). The idea that God is self-sufficient and that everything else comes from divine generosity seems central to the major monotheistic religions.

Nonetheless, let us consider how the modern Platonist theist can restrict the doctrine. There are two obvious possibilities: they can restrict it to contingent things or to concrete things. Abstracta, after all, appear to be neither contingent nor concrete.

The restriction of the creation doctrine to contingent things is unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, it could be that some Platonic entities are contingent. It is widely, though not universally, held that the *de re* proposition that Socrates is snub-nosed can only exist in those worlds where Socrates exists or that the singleton set whose only member is Seabiscuit exists only in those worlds where Seabiscuit exists. If this plausible thesis is true, then the restriction of the creation thesis to contingent things is still incompatible with modern Platonism as some abstracta will be contingent, and hence caused by God exist, and yet abstract things are supposed to be incapable of standing in causal relations.

Second, a restriction of the creation doctrine to contingent things makes it possible for someone to consistently subscribe to the doctrine while holding that neither we nor anything else is created by God. All she needs to do to perform this feat is to hold with Williamson (2013) that all entities exist necessarily. In fact, an *atheist* who accepts Williamson's position could accept the creation doctrine: she could hold that it is (trivially) true that for all x, if x is contingent, then God created x—it's just that nothing is contingent. But a doctrine of creation that can fit with a form of atheism is surely unsatisfactory. Or consider a Leibnizian theist who holds that God necessarily creates the best world.[4] While on that view it would be *true* that God created us and everything around us, oddly on that view it would no longer be a *consequence* of the creation doctrine that God created us and everything around us. The restriction of the creation doctrine to contingent things is thus unsatisfactory.

What about a restriction of the creation doctrine to concrete things? First, it is not clear that it blocks the argument for parthood simplicity. God is a concrete being. And it is plausible that the parts of a concrete being are all themselves concrete. Intuitively, for instance, you and I have no parts in common—you and I are not Siamese twins. But if we had abstract parts, then it would be quite surprising if all our abstract parts were all different.[5] So, probably, we have no abstract parts, and it is plausible that no other concrete things have abstract parts either. But if God has only concrete parts, then a restriction of the creation doctrine to concrete things still yields an argument for parthood simplicity.

Further, another plausible account of concrete things is that they are the things that are capable of causal activity (e.g., Pruss and Rasmussen 2018, Section 1.1). But there is little reason to think that lacking the capability of causal activity would make a thing capable of existing apart from God's causality. *Lacking* a power does not seem to make it easier to exist.

There is a third way of restricting the doctrine of creation. This way, instead of being motivated by modern Platonism, is motivated by the following thought. Suppose that Zeus created everything real except for himself, his soul, and his body parts. We would not hesitate to call Zeus "the Creator of all," understanding the "all" to be restricted to things other than his parts (Zeus counts as an improper part of himself).

So perhaps we should simply restrict the theistic doctrine of creation to things that are not parts of God.

One worry about this restriction is that a pantheist who thinks God didn't create anything can hold to the "doctrine of creation." For a pantheist thinks everything is a part of God. Trivially, then, she will agree that everything that isn't a part of God is created by God. In other words, just as we saw in the case of the restriction to contingent things, the doctrine of creation loses some of its force when restricted to things that aren't parts of God.

Second, what is good enough for Zeus is not good enough for the Anselmian perfect being. The parts of God are presumably the most excellent of the things (see Section 3.2.2 for more discussion of this) in reality other than God. To limit creation so that God doesn't have to create these great and excellent things is to limit God's perfection.

The second controversial premise in the argument for parthood simplicity was (2), that nothing that has proper parts is the cause of all of them. (Trivially, anything that lacks proper parts is the cause of each of its proper parts, hence the restriction to things that have proper parts.) The main potential counterexample seems to be the following. It is possible, and quite likely actual, that some organism has this property: none of the cells in its body right now were there at the beginning of the organism's existence. But new cells are caused by the life-constituting activity of an organism. Thus, the organism is the cause of all of its cells and, by extension, all of its proper parts.

But the move from being a cause of all the cells to being a cause of all the proper parts is problematic. First, the elementary particles making up the cells of organisms do not seem to be caused by the organism. Second, Aristotelians will insist there is reason to think that organisms have form or essence in addition to matter, and that the form or essence is a part of the organism that isn't caused by the organism. Third, if eternalism is true, then the organism's initial cells exist *simpliciter* and yet are not caused by the organism. Thus, the counterexample is not as plausible as it initially seemed.

3.2.2 Perfection

This argument seems quite plausible:

6   God is perfect. (Premise)
7   There are no perfect beings other than God. (Premise)
8   A perfect being has only perfect parts. (Premise)
9   So, God is the only part of God. [By (6)–(8)]

Nevertheless, one can reasonably object that the argument equivocates on 'perfect'. In an absolute sense, a perfect being is one that has all

perfections or great-making properties. It is indeed a part of monotheism that there is only one being like that. In another sense, however, "perfect" is an incomplete term: it needs to be completed by adding a kind-term, as in: a perfect kangaroo, a perfect Tic-Tac-Toe player, and a perfect pair of scissors. Often the context supplies the relevant kind.

On the absolute reading, premise (7) is hard to dispute, but it is not so clear that the parts of an absolutely perfect being have to be absolutely perfect themselves as (8) would claim. On the incomplete-term reading, (6) is plausible in the sense that God is perfect at being God, or maybe even perfect at *being*. But (7) is quite implausible: it seems that every photon is perfect at photonicity, and that God could create a perfect Tic-Tac-Toe player. Moreover, as a special worry to Christians, Jesus says we should be perfect (Mt. 5:48), and so there must be some sort of perfection—perhaps *qua* moral beings—available to us.[6]

Given that it is implausible that the argument is sound on the incomplete-term reading, but simply less than clearly sound on the absolute reading, let's adopt the absolute reading. In this reading, the controversial premise is that an absolutely perfect being's parts are absolutely perfect. This has *some* plausibility. On perfect being theology, we would reasonably expect God's parts to be absolutely perfect, and so the argument boosts the probability that God has parthood simplicity.

3.2.3 Pantheism and Transcendence

Radical pantheism says that everything is identical with God. Parthood simplicity follows from radical pantheism: if everything is identical with God, so are all of God's parts, and hence God has no proper parts. But radical pantheism is easily refuted. I exist and I believe radical pantheism to be false. Hence, if radical pantheism is true, God believes radical pantheism to be false since God is identical with me and *I* believe radical pantheism to be false. But if God believes radical pantheism to be false, then surely radical pantheism is false.

A more moderate form of pantheism denies divine simplicity. On that form, everything is identical with God or with a part of God. It no longer follows from moderate pantheism that I am God, but only that I am merely a part of God, and my quick refutation of radial pantheism does not apply.

At a very general level of description, the metaphysics of moderate pantheism is this:

10 God exists, there are things other than God, and these things are parts of God.

A theist who denies divine simplicity cannot say that this is an incoherent story as far as it goes. For such a theist presumably[7] holds that had

God not created anything, then (10) would have been true. What does such a theist see theologically wrong with moderate pantheism, then?

Well, moderate pantheism together with empirical observation implies that God has *material* parts. But that can't be the central theological problem with pantheism. Pantheism would still be theologically problematic if it turned out that idealism is true and we are all disembodied minds like angels have typically been thought to be.

Plausibly, the fundamental theological problem with moderate pantheism is that it makes imperfect things like us be parts of God. But as we saw in Section 3.2.2, perfection can be understood in two ways: perfection in a kind and absolute perfection. If the monotheist's fundamental theological objection to moderate pantheism is that it allows absolutely imperfect things to be parts of God, then the argument of Section 3.2.2 interpreted to talk about absolute perfection will be sound, and we will have to accept parthood simplicity.

Now consider the option that the fundamental problem is that moderate pantheism allows kind-imperfect things, like you and me, to be parts of God. But then the fundamental problem would have been absent had God created only beings like good angels, photons, and electrons that are perfect instances of their kind. Yet, surely, even if we lived in such a world, pantheism would still have been deeply problematic to the monotheist. So this diagnosis of the problem with pantheism is inadequate.

The best competing characterization of the problem with pantheism is perhaps its denial of divine transcendence. Now, we can plausibly understand divine transcendence in one of three ways:

11 God transcends everything other than God.
12 God transcends everything other than God's parts.
13 God transcends every creature.

Understanding transcendence along the lines of (11) is very plausible, and indeed yields a good argument against moderate pantheism, as long as we accept the auxiliary hypothesis that if x transcends y, then y isn't a part of x. But we also get divine simplicity as an immediate corollary, since if y were a proper part of God, then by (11), God would transcend y, and then y's being a part of God would violate the auxiliary hypothesis.

If we understand transcendence along the lines of (12), then we don't get a quick argument for divine simplicity—but we also don't get an argument against pantheism, since our moderate pantheist will be happy to say that (12) is *trivially* true, all things being God's parts.

That leaves (13). This, however, I argue is a mistaken way to understand transcendence. Suppose that someone believed that space is something that is neither created nor transcended by God. Such a view

would clearly violate divine transcendence, even though it would not violate (13). Allowing that something other than God could fail to be transcended by God no less—and, perhaps, actually more!—violates divine transcendence if that thing isn't created by God.

We can now put the above thoughts into a nondeductive argument. There is something theologically repugnant to monotheism even about moderate pantheism. A good explanation of the problem the monotheist sees in pantheism is that pantheism allows things that aren't absolutely perfect to be parts of God. But that line of thought implies parthood simplicity. The best alternative explanation of what is wrong with moderate pantheism is that it violates divine transcendence. But as we saw there are three initially plausible accounts of transcendence. The first implied parthood simplicity, too. The second failed to contradict moderate pantheism and hence was inadequate in this context. And the third failed to capture the doctrine of transcendence.

3.3 Attribute Instance Simplicity

The most prominent example of a constituent that might not be a part is an attribute or property instance. Thus, my humanity or my tallness might be constituents of me that are not parts. Attribute instance simplicity says that all of God's intrinsic attribute instances, such as God's love, justice, mercy, wisdom, and omnipotence, are identical with God. Attribute instance simplicity is trivially true if there are no such instances, and it follows from parthood simplicity if it turns out that all constituents are parts. But even if constituents are parts, it would be nice to have some arguments specifically for attribute instance simplicity. For attribute instances, simplicity is especially controversial in light of the fact that we would expect instances of different properties to be distinct from each other. Thus, since justice and mercy are in general distinct properties, Socrates' justice and Socrates' mercy will be distinct. But then one might expect this to hold in the case of God's justice and God's mercy as well.

Note that even if constituents aren't parts, some of the arguments I gave for parthood simplicity have plausible analogs for constituents. For instance, just as we would expect God's parts to be absolutely perfect, we would expect no less of God's constituents. Likewise, recall the argument that explaining what is monotheistically objectionable to a pantheism on which we are parts of God leads to commitments that imply parthood simplicity. On Spinoza's pantheism, we are constituents ("modes") of God, and explaining what is monotheistically unacceptable about that in ways parallel to what we did for the parthood pantheism version will yield constituent simplicity.

Graham Oppy (2003) has, however, given a coherent account of attribute instance simplicity using truthmakers.[8] Plausibly, attribute

instances should be identified with the truthmakers of attributions of the attributes—with the things that make the attributions true. Thus, Socrates' justice is identical with whatever makes the proposition that Socrates is just be a true proposition. It could then turn out that the same thing serves as the truthmaker of the proposition that God is just and of the proposition that God is merciful. If so, then God's justice would be identical with God's mercy, in something like the way that *Alice's throbbing pain* can be both *Alice's throbbing* and *Alice's pain*, there being but one mental state making true each of the three propositions (a) that Alice is in throbbing pain, (b) that Alice has a throbbing sensation, and (c) that Alice is in pain. And, finally, it could further turn out that not only is the truthmaker of the proposition *that God is just* identical with the truthmaker of the proposition *that God is merciful*, but that truthmaker could be God himself: both propositions could be true in virtue of God existing.

We now move on to some arguments for attribute instance simplicity.

3.3.1 *God is Love and The New Testament*

Unlike the other arguments, this one will likely primarily appeal to Christians. The New Testament proclaims that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). This could be taken to be an emphatic way of saying that being loving is a central and essential aspect of God's nature. But the claim that God is love is a *seminal* claim in the Christian tradition. Such seminal claims are ones in which we should continually find new depths rather than try to deflate. There is thus good reason to read the claim that God is love as saying that God is *identical* with his attribute instance of love.[9]

One could, of course, limit the identity claim to love. Perhaps God is identical with the attribute instance of his being loving, while he is not identical with other attributes. Still, God's identity with one attribute instance significantly increases the probability of attribute instance simplicity. First, it shows that there is no contradiction in God's being identical with an attribute instance—there is no confusion of categories, for instance. That defuses some intuitions opposed to attribute instance simplicity. Second, it provides inductive confirmation of attribute instance simplicity. Third, there is some reason to think that all of a being's attribute instances are metaphysically on par: thus, if one is identical with the being, so are they all.

Finally, if God were his love without also being all his other attribute instances, then saying that God is love would yield a very neat characterization of what God is, a characterization that would go some ways to making God comprehensible. But God is incomprehensible according to the great monotheistic traditions. And *full* attribute instance simplicity ensures this. We hear that God is love. This is mysterious, but now it seems to us that we somewhat understand what God is. Yet when we

learn that the God who is his love is also his justice and his mercy and his omnipotence, the mystery is restored.

3.3.2 Incomprehensibility

Consider this argument against the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility:

14 We can understand mercy.
15 If we can understand mercy, we can understand God's mercy.
16 If we can understand God's mercy, then God is not completely incomprehensible.

A plausible way to block this argument is by distinguishing between understanding creaturely mercy and understanding divine mercy, and saying that we cannot understand mercy in all cases, but only creaturely mercy, so premise (14) is false.

But now consider that if I understand a watermelon's greenness, I understand the greenness of grass as well. Why is it not equally the case that if I understand creaturely mercy, then I understand divine mercy as well? Presumably, the defender of divine incomprehensibility who denies the conditional (15) will say that creaturely mercy is not sufficiently like divine mercy for the understanding of the creaturely instance to transfer to the divine instance. And the doctrine of divine attribute instance simplicity gives us an elegant explanation of what makes the two mercies to be very much unlike each other: divine mercy is also identical with all the other divine attributes, perhaps most interestingly divine justice, while creaturely mercy is distinct from other creaturely attributes. A mercy that is not merely *compatible with* justice but is *identical* with it is a radically different mercy from creaturely mercy.

Divine attribute simplicity thus provides a good explanation of why we cannot move from comprehension of creaturely mercy to comprehension of divine mercy.[10] This gives us some reason to accept divine attribute simplicity, though it is far from conclusive since there could turn out to be other explanations. (For instance, it might well be that careful reflection on mercy and justice will reveal that a *perfect* mercy cannot lack justice and a *perfect* justice cannot lack mercy.)

However, there is something particularly attractive about the divine attribute simplicity solution: it uniformly applies across all the attributes that God shares with creatures, such as justice, wisdom, knowledge, power, etc., thereby blocking a multitude of arguments against God's incomprehensibility similar to (14)–(16). A unified explanation of incomprehensibility that applies elegantly across a lot of cases has much going for it. Of course, once again, it could turn out that there is some other equally unified explanation of all the cases. But finding such an

explanation is likely to be a difficult task. The above consideration, thus, does provide some evidence for divine attribute instance simplicity.

3.3.3 Idolatry

17 It is permissible to center one's life on God's love. (Premise)
18 To center one's life on anything other than God is idolatry. (Premise)
19 Idolatry is impermissible. (Premise)
20 If God is other than God's love, then to center one's life on God's love is idolatry. [By (18)]
21 If God is other than God's love, then to center one's life on God's love is impermissible. [By (19) and (20)]
22 So, God is God's love. [By (17) and (21)]

But, as in Section 3.3.1, if God is God's love, then probably all of God's instances are identical with God. The difference between the current argument and that of Section 3.3.1 is that in this argument we are not relying on Christian revelation to establish the identity between God and God's love, but rather on intuition (17) and an opposition to idolatry that the Western monotheistic religions all have in common.

One can object to (17) that a life focused on God's love misses out on God's other attributes, such as his justice. Very well. But then we should still be able to say that a life centered on God's love and justice and some other attributes is permissible. And yet it is also idolatry to center a life on a plurality of things none of which is God. So at least one of the attributes in the plurality of things that we can permissibly center our lives on must be identical to God. But plausibly all of God's attributes are in the same boat with respect to identity with God, so if any one of them is identical to God, they all are.

However, even if the premises of the argument of this section are true, perhaps the argument is invalid by way of misleading grammar. To say that someone's life is centered on God's love may be to say elliptically that her life is centered on God in respect of his love, and then derivation of (20) from (18) would fail.

But either there exist attribute instances like *God's love* or there are no such attribute instances. If such attribute instances do exist, and if they are distinct from God, then one *could* center one's life on one of them without centering one's life on God: one *could* spend one's life thinking about the attribute instances, imitating them in one's life, and so on. It would be a bad idea to live a life like that if these attribute instances are not identical with God, but that only underscores the truth of (21). Thus the argument can be taken at face value without any misleading grammar.

On the other hand, if there are no divine attribute instances, then *trivially* all divine attribute instances are identical with God.

Perhaps, though, with this clarification, one can now deny (17). It is permissible to center one's life on God *qua* loving, but to center one's life on God's love is wrong. Compare how it is much better to center a friendship on one's friend *qua* virtuous than to center it on the friend's virtue. Perhaps in the case of God it is not only much better to center one's life on God *qua* loving than to center it on God's love, but the latter is actually impermissible.

Nonetheless, denying (17) is implausible. Consider a person who genuinely loves God for himself, but her central focus in life—what motivates her in her central life pursuits—is very specifically God's love. This does not seem to be an impermissible way of life.

3.4 Final Remarks

A number of arguments can be given for divine simplicity, or for aspects of divine simplicity. And beyond all these arguments there is a strong initial presumption in favor of the doctrine: it is clearly strongly favored by Ockham's Razor over other theories of the divine nature, precisely because it is ontologically (though maybe not conceptually[11]) simpler. When an ontologically simpler theory has significant intellectual benefits, that makes for a strong case for the theory.

Notes

1 For instance, the Lateran IV and Vatican I Councils taught the doctrine as dogma.
2 For recent defenses of divine simplicity see (Oppy 2003), (Pruss 2003; 2008; 2021a; 2021b) and (Brower 2009). I find Aquinas's (1920, Part I) reconciliation of trinitarianism with divine simplicity convincing.
3 On a minority interpretation (Zeller 1922; for a critique, see Vlastos 1969), the historical Plato thought that the Form of the Good is causally responsible for aspects of the world's arrangement, and if so, then he wouldn't be a Platonist in the modern sense.
4 Leibniz is not exactly this Leibnizian theist, as the historical Leibniz makes a distinction between moral and logical necessity.
5 Ockham (1990, p. 36) uses this variant of the argument: If we have abstract parts, then Christ shares a part with a sinner in hell, and hence Christ is partly in hell, which Ockham thinks is absurd.
6 This argument is based on (Ellis 2016).
7 I bracket the possibility of a theist who thinks that God would be simple if he didn't create, but the act of creation multiplied his parts. Ockham's razor does not favor such a story. I also take it for granted that God was free not to create.
8 The account was rediscovered independently by (Pruss 2003; 2008) and (Brower 2009).
9 There might seem to be an alternate reading that God is the *property* (not just property instance) of loving. Thus, anybody who loves instantiates God. While this reading is indeed non-deflationary, it goes too far. It abandons God's transcendence, by making creatures have God as a property when they

love. It is much better to say that God is identical with *his* love, not with love in general. (Compare Aquinas's well-known insistence that God is being, but not the being of everything.)

10 The identity between divine attributes and the divine essence is one of Aquinas' arguments in favor of his theory of analogy, which is his way of fleshing out the incomprehensibility of God while making it fit with the possibility of substantive and positive theological language (Aquinas 1920, I.13).

11 See the title of Oppy (2003)!

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4 The Problem of Talking about "the God of gods"

Gyula Klima

4.1 Introduction: The General Problem of Talking about God

Talking about God (or even *to* God) is not as easy as it may sound. Exactly whom are we talking about (or addressing)? How can we make sure? Are we talking about the same God, especially, if we are coming from different religious backgrounds (Jews, Christians, Muslims, at the very least, but what about polytheists, agnostics, and atheists)? Can we even say anything true about Him (Her?!), properly speaking? How can believers even make sense of these claims to those who do not believe in God?

These are nagging questions indeed to believers, as well as they should be to intelligent nonbelievers, who at least care to understand what they deny. After all, your garden variety pop-atheist denying the existence of a powerful angry old man spitefully ruling the world from his throne in the sky would certainly not contradict an intelligent theist, who would wholeheartedly agree with this denial. So, exactly what or who is it whose existence the traditional theist would affirm, and an intelligent atheist would deny?

To answer such "what" questions we first need to clarify *what we mean* by the word we use to formulate them. It is only after clarifying *what we mean* that we can address the issue *what the thing we mean is*, provided *there is* such a thing at all.[1] So, what do we mean and what do we intend to refer to by the word 'God' (and its equivalents in other languages)?

4.2 The Meaning of the Word "God": Augustine's Account

Before addressing this question, I should clarify who the "we" are according to whose intention and usage I intend to clarify the meaning and reference of the term. After all, in the foregoing example our intelligent believer could wholeheartedly agree with the pop-atheist in the latter's

denial of the existence of what he called "God," only because the believer would not call *that* "God," and after her expression of agreement, our intelligent believer would immediately clarify that the reason she can agree to the atheist's denial is that she means something completely different by this word. So, if the atheist wants to genuinely contradict her, he has to follow her usage, or else he is simply talking past her (working in *ignoratio elenchi*).

However, this is an easy case: clearly, someone wanting to contradict someone else needs to be able to refer to the same and deny his opponent's claim about the same. But how can we ensure this sameness of reference in the case of an object that by the intended meaning of the phrase we use we cannot point to? Note that this is not just a theological issue: we can have a precise identification of an object of thought we cannot point to, for instance in math, where we know we cannot write out in decimal notation the number which we identify as the ratio of the circumference and the diameter of a circle, and we name by the Greek letter *pi*. However, do we have a similarly precise description of what traditional theists mean by the word "God" in English or by the word "Deus" in Latin, for example?

St. Augustine of Hippo took it upon himself to provide an at least sufficiently precise characterization of this meaning, by talking about the "God of gods," to contrast it with the way polytheistic believers talk about their gods. In his *On Christian Doctrine,* Book I. Chap. 7, he describes what "all men understand by the term 'God'" as follows:

> For when the one supreme God of gods is thought of, even by those who believe that there are other gods, and who call them by that name, and worship them as gods, their thought takes the form of an endeavor to reach the conception of a nature, than which nothing more excellent or more exalted exists. And since men are moved by different kinds of pleasures, partly by those which pertain to the bodily senses, partly by those which pertain to the intellect and soul, those of them who are in bondage to sense think that either the heavens, or what appears to be most brilliant in the heavens, or the universe itself, is God of gods: or if they try to get beyond the universe, they picture to themselves something of dazzling brightness, and think of it vaguely as infinite, or of the most beautiful form conceivable; or they represent it in the form of the human body, if they think that superior to all others. Or if they think that there is no one God supreme above the rest, but that there are many or even innumerable gods of equal rank, still these too they conceive as possessed of shape and form, according to what each man thinks the pattern of excellence. Those, on the other hand, who endeavor by an effort of the intelligence to reach a conception of God, place Him above all visible and bodily natures, and even above all intelligent

and spiritual natures that are subject to change. All, however, strive emulously to exalt the excellence of God: nor could anyone be found to believe that any being to whom there exists a superior is God. And so, all concur in believing that God is that which excels in dignity all other objects.[2]

On the basis of this passage, at least two things should be clear: 1. Augustine wants to make a clear distinction between the pagans' gods and *the* God of gods he wants to talk about; 2. This distinction has to be obvious on the grounds of the intended meaning of the term "God." So, even if the gods can be any sort of powerful entities, they cannot be the God of gods, given that by the meaning of the term "God" they cannot fall under it: despite all their powerful features, if they have any shortcomings, as the pagan gods obviously do, they can be like Superman, but they cannot be "that which excels in dignity all other objects."

It should also be clear that given the positive superlative construction (for all y such that y is not x, x > y), there can be only one object that satisfies the description (for suppose you have two such objects, *a,* and *b*; then *a > b* and *b > a*, which is impossible). To be sure, this still does not guarantee that there actually is *any* such object, only that *if there is one*, then *there cannot be more*. This is precisely the reason why St. Anselm of Canterbury, who takes over Augustine's description in his own famous formula: that than which nothing greater can be thought (*id quo nihil maius cogitari potest*) can use a Latin phrase that has the force of a definite description (despite Latin's lack of a definite article), and still feels the need to provide an argument to show that the phrase is not vacuous in reality, namely, that the description refers not merely to an object of thought of anyone who uses the phrase with under-standing, but to an actually, mind-independently existing object in reality. Perhaps, a brief recapitulation of the famous argument of the Proslogion will be helpful here, just in order to see precisely what is at stake in identifying the intended referent of the phrase with a really existing object.

4.3 Anselm's Argument based on Augustine's Meaning

Anselm's argument has the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*: assume the contradictory of what you intend to prove; next, with the help of self-evident, undeniable premises, derive a contradiction, which proves that the assumption and the other premises cannot all be true together. But then, given the undeniability of the other premises, you can con-clude to the falsity of the assumption and thereby to the truth of its contradictory. So, here is what I take to be the simplest way to lay out Anselm's argument:

1 God = that than which nothing greater can be thought = d (where 'D' just abbreviates the long description)
2 D can be thought
3 D does not exist in reality
4 If something can be thought and does not exist in reality, then something greater than it can be thought
5 If D can be thought and d does not exist in reality, then something greater than D can be thought [by UI from 4]
6 Something greater than D can be thought [by MP from 2, 3, and 5]
7 Something greater than that than which nothing greater can be thought can be thought [by SI from 1 and 6]
8 3 is false [since 7 is a contradiction, and 1, 2, and 4 are self-evidently true]
9 D does exist in reality [from 8 and 3]
10 God exists in reality [by SI from 9 and 1]

This argument is clearly valid, and with their proper understanding, the auxiliary premises (1, 2, and 4) are indeed self-evidently true, and they can all be accepted without the (tacit) acceptance of the intended conclusion; so, the argument is not begging the question.

But then, how come intelligent atheists, who can understand and accept without hesitation, say, Euclid's *reductio ad absurdum* proof of the nonexistence of a greatest prime number, do not "buy" Anselm's proof with the same sort of confidence? In some of my earlier papers I have argued that this is possible neither because there is a genuine flaw in the argument, nor because there is a genuine flaw in the understanding of atheists, but simply because of a ubiquitous phenomenon I referred to as "parasitic reference."[3]

4.4 The Problem of "Parasitic Reference" to God, and Aquinas' Way Out

When one thinks of a thought object under some description and believes the description applies to that thought object or just conceives of this thought object *as* one satisfying this description, not necessarily believing that the description *in fact* applies to this thought object, as when one makes up a fable, we can say the person in question makes *constitutive* reference to that thought object. In such a case the person making the constitutive reference is committed to all implications of the description to avoid inconsistency. On the other hand, if someone else picks up this referent, though for some reason not thinking that the description applies to the thought object in question, then this other person makes parasitic reference to this thought object, without any commitment to the same implications.

Thus, the atheist can say that when Anselm thinks of that than which nothing greater can be thought, Anselm has a thought object in his mind

that he thinks satisfies his description, along with all its implications. The atheist, however, can then think of the same thought object as that of which Anselm thinks as that than which nothing greater can be thought, granting that Anselm is committed to thinking that his thought object exists in reality, without however committing himself to the same conclusion.

Therefore, the atheist can claim that he perfectly understands Anselm's description, and still deny that he has in mind something of which he thinks satisfies Anselm's description. At the same time, he can also point out that this does not prevent him from thinking of Anselm's thought object, by making parasitic reference to it. So, Anselm's proof will not convert the atheist, who does not share Anselm's belief that his description applies to something, though he understands that many people have this belief, and he is even able to identify the object of this belief, as that fiction, the God of the religious.

So, the atheist, when speaking about God, is constantly making parasitic reference to the theist's object of thought, using the theist's beliefs to refer to this thought object, but without ever sharing them. Accordingly, he will be willing to admit that whoever thinks of something as that than which nothing greater can be thought also has to think that this thing exists in reality and that it cannot even be thought not to exist in reality. Being a consistent atheist, however, he himself will think of nothing as that than which nothing greater can be thought (whence that than which nothing greater can be thought *as such* will not be in *his* mind). But he still will be able to think of what theists think of as that than which nothing greater can be thought.

Parasitic reference to each other's thought objects between people not sharing each other's beliefs seems to be a ubiquitous phenomenon. The most sensitive cases are, of course, those that involve people's most basic beliefs, such as religious beliefs. Accordingly, parasitic reference is a phenomenon to be seriously reckoned with not only in dialogues between theists and atheists but also between people of different religious faiths.[4]

Aquinas was evidently aware of this problem, as is clear from his discussion of a certain aspect of the dialogue between Christians and pagans:

> "… the Catholic who says that the idol is not God contradicts the pagan who claims that it is, for both of them use the name 'God' to signify the true God. For when the pagan says that the idol is God, he does not use this name insofar as it signifies something that people only believe to be God, <but which is not God>, for in this way he would be telling the truth, as sometimes even Catholics use this name in this signification, as when it is said that all the gods of the heathen are demons."[5]

Aquinas' principal point here is that both the pagan and the Christian can use the same word, "God," in the same sense, meaning the true God, whence the affirmation and negation of the same term of the same object, namely of the pagan's idol, by the two parties yields a real contradiction. On the other hand, he also remarks on a possible parasitic usage of the same term by the Christian in such a dialogue. According to the Christian, the term "God" in its proper meaning cannot refer to the idol, which is why he denies that the idol is God. Still, he can use the same term in an improper sense, not meaning the true God, but meaning what the pagan believes to be the true God, thereby referring to the pagan's god, namely the idol. So here Aquinas is evidently aware of the possibility of the type of reference I called parasitic, when a person not sharing someone else's belief may use the other's belief to make reference to the thing thought by the other person to satisfy this belief.

Given the awareness of this possibility on Aquinas' part and the possibility to evade by its help the force of Anselm's argument, we may risk the assumption that this awareness played some role in Aquinas' rejection of Anselm's argument.

Indeed, in the *Summa contra Gentiles* St. Thomas writes as follows:

> "… granted that by the name 'God' everyone understands that than which a greater cannot be thought, it does not follow that there is something than which a greater cannot be thought of in the nature of things. For we have to posit the name and its interpretation in the same way. Now from the fact that it is conceived by the mind what is indicated by the name 'God,' it does not follow that God exists, except in the intellect. Whence it is not necessary either that that than which a greater cannot be thought of exists, except in the intellect. And from this it does not follow that there is something than which a greater cannot be thought of in the nature of things. And so, no inconsistency is involved in the position of those who think that God does not exist; for no inconsistency is involved in being able, for any given thing either in the intellect or in reality, to think something greater, except for those who concede that there is something than which a greater cannot be thought of in the nature of things."[6]

In this passage, Aquinas explicitly refers to the asymmetry in the positions of the theist and the atheist with respect to Anselm's argument. Those who think of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought of, making constitutive reference to God by this description, cannot think that he does not exist, save inconsistently. For those, however, who think that for any thought object a greater is thinkable, no inconsistency arises when they make parasitic reference to what in their view is mistakenly believed by the theists to satisfy this description, which, in their view, exists only in the theists' intellect.

Anselm's argument, therefore, can be compelling only for those who are willing to make by means of his description *constitutive* reference to God, that is, whose "universe" of thought objects already contains a thought object than which, they think, nothing greater is thinkable. This willingness, however, cannot be enforced by Anselm's argument on anyone whose "universe" of thought objects does not contain such a thought object. Such a person, therefore, has to be persuaded first to be willing to think of something as that than which no greater is thinkable. But this, in view of the possibility of parasitic reference, cannot be achieved by simply telling him to think of what the description applies to, as he simply does not think the description applies to anything, although, of course, he believes that others think it applies to something.

As can be seen, what helps the atheist maintain the consistency of his position is his isolating the theist's thought objects from his own: when it comes to giving a consistent account of the world as he sees it, the beliefs concerning God, though may be known to him, are simply irrelevant to the atheist (except insofar as belief in God influences the thinking and behavior of religious people), as these beliefs do not concern his own thought objects, those that he is committed to, by making constitutive reference to them. So, to prove for the atheist that there is a God requires to show him that given the domain of thought objects he is already committed to, he is also committed to making constitutive reference to something that the theist can justifiably identify for him as God.[7]

Indeed, this type of consideration seems to be the main theoretical reason not only for Aquinas' rejection of Anselm's *a priori* argument, but also for his strategy of using *a posteriori* arguments, all starting with what is better known to us (*quoad nos*), namely, namely, natural phenomena to which we are already committed. For although, as he argues, the proposition "God exists" is self-evident in itself (*per se nota secundum se*), it is not self-evident to us (*per se nota quoad nos*).

4.5 Do we Know what we Mean by "God," According to Aquinas?

At this point, however, one may have serious doubts, as to whether we really know what we are talking about when we are trying to talk about God. In fact, it is even doubtful what we mean, when we use the term "God" with understanding. For Aquinas' pagan calling the idol "God" certainly does not have in mind either Anselm's or Augustine's formulae allegedly explicating this meaning. Yet, Aquinas says that when the pagan and the Christian genuinely contradict each other about the idol (the pagan saying, "This is God," pointing at the idol, and the Christian saying, "This is not God," pointing at the same), both use the term with the same meaning, as it is intended to refer to the true God.

For a proper answer to this question, we should have a little more articulate account of the relevant medieval conception of how our words are related to the things we mean by them. A common noun, such as 'gold', being subordinated to the concept whereby we conceive of gold, signifies that on account of which we can conceive of all pieces of gold as opposed to any other kind of things, without distinctly conceiving of any individual piece. What makes any piece of gold true gold is its aureity, its golden nature, whatever it is, and whether we know or not how to articulate what it is, whether we mistakenly believe as medieval alchemist's did that gold is a mixture of the four Aristotelian elements, or as we now are supposed to know that it is the element of atomic number 79. But whether a modern chemist or an alchemist is talking about a piece of gold, they both use the term 'gold' as signifying that nature of true gold, and thus they can both refer to the same things with the same meaning of the same term, although the alchemist is mistaken in his characterization of that nature. And despite their disagreement, they can agree in saying that the piece of pyrite (iron sulfide) a gold digger brought to them claiming it is gold, is not gold, but just a piece of fool's gold (say, because it sparks when struck against flint, which true gold would not do). So, although they disagree about the characterization of true gold's nature (or more technically, about the quidditative definition of gold) they both can genuinely contradict the gold digger (who actually has no idea of the competing theories about the quidditative definition of gold) claiming the piece of pyrite he brought to be true gold.[8]

So, likewise, the Christian and the pagan can genuinely contradict each other, because they both mean the true divine nature to be signified by the term 'God', although actually neither of them has any idea of the quidditative definition of God. Indeed, Aquinas says that none of us can ever have that. As he claims:

> "For the divine substance, by its immensity, surpasses all forms that our intellect attains; and so, we cannot apprehend him by cognizing what he is. But we can have some sort of cognition of Him by cognizing what he is not."[9]

So, to answer the question of this section, we have to say that when talking about God, we don't know what we are talking about, although this is not particularly special: most of the time we don't know what we are talking about, just as the gold digger or the alchemist don't know what they are talking about when they are talking about gold, at least in the sense of knowing the true quidditative definition of the thing, properly characterizing the true nature of the thing meant by its name. In fact, Aquinas also quite famously makes the observation about the weakness of our cognition of the nature of things:

"… our cognition is so weak that no philosopher was ever able to perfectly investigate the nature of a single fly; thus, it is written that a philosopher spent thirty years to find out about the nature of bees."[10]

To be sure, instead of thirty years of solitude, the teamwork of a group of scientists may yield better results, as it did in sequencing the genome of the common fruit fly (*drosophila melanogaster*), which is certainly a step closer to understanding its essence (even if its genome may not be its essence, but that is another issue).[11] But Aquinas' point about the divine essence is that it is in principle unattainable by our minds. So, we can never possibly form a quidditative definition of the divine essence as (we think) we did of the nature of gold or of fool's gold. Yet, and this is the point, even if we can never have this definition that would enable us to know what God is in His own nature, we can still mean by His name that nature, and we can still specify what we mean by all sorts of indications allowing us to conclude what He is not, much like the alchemist could determine by a simple test that the piece of fool's gold brought by the gold digger was not true gold, which both he and the gold digger meant when they contradicted each other.

All in all, even when we talk about things whose nature is simply beyond our ken, we can be quite certain about *what we mean to talk about*, even if we cannot know *what the thing that we mean to talk about* is. And this much affords us at least ways to know *what the thing in question is not*: indeed, this is the rationale for apophatic or negative theology, which actually tells us a great deal about God. But assuming we have a way of a natural cognition of the existence of God whether *a priori*, which Aquinas denies, or *a posteriori*, which he affirms and attempts to prove in many ways, can we say anything with certainty *positively* about God?

4.6 Can we Say Anything with Certainty Positively About God According to Aquinas?

Aquinas says we can, but never properly, only metaphorically, or analogically. In the prologue to his commentary on the Pseudo-Dionysius' *On Divine Names,* he sets out four possible ways for us to talk intelligently about God, tying them to the works of the Areopagite, in the following manner:

"[Dionysius] artfully divided all that is contained in the Holy Scriptures about God in a four-fold division: for in a certain book that we do not have, which is entitled 'On the Divine Hypotypes,' that is, characters, he discussed those things about God that pertain to the unity of divine essence and the distinction of divine persons.

Of this unity and distinction there is no adequate similitude in creatures, but this mystery exceeds all capabilities of natural reason. Those things said about God in the Scriptures, however, which do have some similarity in creatures, are two-fold. For in some cases this similarity is observed with respect to something that is derived from God to the creatures, as every good thing is good from the First Good and every living thing is alive from the First Life, etc. And Dionysius discusses these in the book 'On Divine Names,' which we have on hand here. In other cases, however, the similarity is observed with regard to something transferred from the creatures to God, as when God is called a lion, a rock, or the sun, or suchlike; for in this way God is named symbolically or metaphorically. And these were treated by Dionysius in the book he titled 'On Symbolic Theology.' However, because all similarities of creatures to God are defective, and that which God Himself is exceeds everything that is found in creatures, whatever we cognize in creatures in the way in which it is in creatures is removed from Him. In this way, after all those that led by the creatures our intellect is capable of conceiving about God, that which God Himself is remains occult and unknown. For God is not only not a rock or the sun, which are apprehended by the senses, but neither is such life or essence that our intellect can comprehend, and so, the very thing that is God, since exceeds everything we can apprehend, remains to us unknown. Of these removals, through which God remains to us unknown and occult, Dionysius made another book, which he entitled 'On Mystical (that is occult) Theology'."[12]

So, the upshot of these considerations is that given the way we acquire our concepts (by abstracting them from our experience of creatures) which provide the proper meanings of our terms, our terms cannot properly express anything positively about God, whose nature cannot adequately be comprehended by any of our mundane concepts, even if we *can* signify divine nature by this name without comprehending it. And even if no single concept we gain from creatures can adequately represent divine nature, given that creatures in their natures are just partial, finite realizations of some of God's infinite perfection, the concepts we draw from them can still tell us something about God, just like even a blurred old daguerreotype can tell us something (not all!) about the person pictured in it. But Aquinas' point is that our ordinary concepts giving the proper meanings of our words as they ordinarily apply to creatures (as do 'lion' to lions, "rock" to rocks, "living" to living things, 'good' to good things, and even 'being' to all beings) cannot apply to God in the same sense, yet they can in some other improper, "poetic," i.e., metaphorical or analogical sense, where the difference between the two is whether ordinary primary significate is something that necessarily

implies some limitation of perfection or not. However, even in the case of terms that signify some absolute perfection without any limitation, and so with regard to *what they signify* they should primarily apply to God, given that we formed the concepts expressed by them by abstracting the concepts from creaturely perfections, with regard to *their mode of signifying* they still primarily apply to creatures, and thus they apply to God only inappropriately, "with a stretch," by analogy.

Thus, according to Aquinas, *the conceptual order has to match the real order of things* in that our ordinary concepts can adequately (although not always with scientific precision, in terms of a quidditative definition) represent the natures of ordinary objects (those within our experience), and although these ordinary concepts as they are cannot apply to the extraordinary, infinite reality of divine nature, still, by "stretching" our ordinary concepts beyond their ordinary application, they can inappropriately, metaphorically or analogically reflect some of the infinite perfection of divine nature.[13] Accordingly, even in the case of those names that signify some absolute perfection that is primarily in God, it is *only* by means of this analogical stretching of our ordinary concepts of the perfections expressed by these names as they apply to creatures that we can inappropriately, in an analogical sense, apply them to God.[14]

4.7 Scotus on the Requirement of Univocity

While Aquinas' approach to talking about God in this way quite appropriately stresses divine transcendence while retaining the requirement of the match between the conceptual order and the real order of things, a generation later, John Duns Scotus vehemently objected to this approach on the grounds that this threatens the status of theology as a science, given that its use of analogical terms in its reasoning would vitiate all its demonstration, falling victim to the fallacy of equivocation.[15]

Consider the following syllogism: Anything that is a bat is a flying mammal; any baseball bat is a bat; therefore, any baseball bat is a flying mammal. The argument is clearly not valid, insofar as the premises are true, because in the sense in which a flying mammal is a bat, a baseball bat is not a bat. The argument is vitiated by the fallacy of equivocation. But this holds, apparently, not only in the case of equivocal terms but also in the case of analogical terms. Consider the following argument: Everything that is healthy is alive; but the food on your plate is healthy; therefore, the food on your plate is alive. Clearly, unless you are about to consume something that is alive, the food on your plate is healthy only in the sense that it makes you healthy, but not in the sense that it is alive and well. However, it is only in that sense of 'healthy' that the first premise can be true. So, an argument of this sort is fallacious even with analogical terms. Accordingly, if 'being' or 'good' cannot be predicated

of God and creatures in the same sense, then, apparently, all arguments arguing from creaturely being to divine being are fallacious (which would render absolutely all arguments about God fallacious, provided that all predications are just variously determined predications of being, and all our cognition derives from our cognition of creatures).

To be sure, Thomists could still respond, as for instance Aquinas' great commentator Cajetan did, that some analogical terms still possess sufficient unity to secure the validity of reasoning with them. Take for instance the following argument: Whatever is seen is cognized; this mathematical problem is seen by the intellect; therefore, this mathematical problem is cognized. Clearly, in this piece of reasoning, the minor premise is true only in the secondary sense of "see," in which it applies to the intellect, whereas the major premise is true whether "see" is taken in the bodily or in the intellectual sense. By contrast, consider the following argument: Whatever is seen is colored; this mathematical problem is seen by the intellect; therefore, this mathematical problem is colored. In this case, the major premise is true only in the bodily sense of "see," whereas the minor premise is only true in the intellectual sense, and that is why there is fallacy in the argument. However, in the previous argument there is no fallacy precisely because the major premise is true in both related senses.[16]

Nevertheless, despite the genuine possibility of forming valid arguments with analogical terms (which, as Cajetan pointed out, invalidates Scotus' charge), Scotus opted for the idea that we can form in our minds at least logically univocal concepts, which apply equally to God and creatures. To be sure the idea was not original with Scotus. Aquinas, with reference to Aristotle, often notes that the genus of "body" is univocal only for the logician, insofar as it abstracts from the peculiarities of the matter of various kinds of bodies, but not for the physicist, who needs to consider precisely the different kinds of matter of different natural bodies, and on that account would not subsume celestial and sublunary bodies under the same natural kind.[17] But Scotus' systematic application of the idea to talking about God and creatures yielded a new, logically univocal conception of the transcendentals, thereby *widening the gap, as it were, between the conceptual and real orders*, at least in respect of the issue of the applicability of at least some of our mundane concepts to God. For although the logically univocal transcendental terms ('being', 'good', 'one', 'thing', etc.) equally apply to substances and accidents as well as to God and creatures, as far as the real perfection of the entities themselves are concerned, the differences are vast, indeed, in the case of God and creatures, the real difference is infinite.[18]

At any rate, it seems to be this aspect of Scotus' thought that his otherwise relentless critic, the "arch-nominalist" William Ockham seized upon, making the difference between the conceptual and real orders the whole point of his reductionist ontological program.

4.8 Ockham's Nominalist Theology and Its Significance

For Ockham, the exception becomes the rule: *the conceptual order*, for him, *is vastly different from the real order*. There are ten conceptual categories, as Aristotle described them in his *Categories*, but there are only two real categories: substance and quality. These are entities in the same sense, yet, they are radically different, insofar as the latter is causally dependent for its existence on the former. Our ordinary concepts do not grasp the natures of things determining the ways the singulars are, while having a less-than-numerical unity and an appropriate mode of being, to be individuated in the singulars by their individual difference, their 'haecceity' as Scotus imagined. For Ockham, everything is individual; so, nothing needs to be "individuated," and the only universals are those individual mental acts, the qualities of our minds we call intellectual concepts, whereby we can conceive of several individuals of the same kind indifferently.

However, given all this, Ockham is neither a skeptic nor a conventionalist in his epistemology or logic, despite usual accusations to the contrary.[19] In fact, the novelty in Ockham's approach to realism is his strategy to show that he can provide a consistent, nonskeptical, nonconventionalist system of thought *without* real universals or other spurious entities acknowledged by realists, and that, as a result, wielding his famed Razor, he can simply cut them out from his ontology.

For Ockham, things are mind-independently sorted into their natural kinds, although not because of some common nature distinct from and inherent in them, but because of the things themselves. For him, the essential similarity of co-specific or co-generic individuals is a "brute fact," not needing any further explanation. The same goes for things' essential dependencies, that is, their natural causal relations. Therefore, Ockham's nominalism does not have any direct epistemological implications concerning his natural theology, although it does demand a strict application of a high standard of scientific demonstration.

In fact, Ockham's nominalist semantics and the ontological parsimony it affords to make for him the treatment of certain theological topics much simpler than the framework provided by the *via antiqua*, such as the doctrine of divine simplicity. According to this doctrine, divine perfection demands God's absolute simplicity, that is, the denial of any sort of composition in Him. Thus, while realists struggle with the issue of what the multitude of divine attributes correspond to in the absolutely simple divine essence, for Ockham, the issue simply boils down to the multitude of our imperfect, abstractive concepts of perfections as we know them in creatures, which is, however certainly compatible with the unity and simplicity of the source of all perfections, which these concepts indifferently and confusedly represent.

But similar considerations drive Ockham's account of God's cognition of His creatures, i.e., his theory of Divine Ideas. While for Augustine, divine ideas are the universal exemplars of all creation in God's mind, Ockham identifies them with the objects of His cognition, i.e., the creatures themselves. So, Ockham can easily claim that there is no conflict between the multiplicity of Divine Ideas and the simplicity of God, since the multiplicity of ideas is just the multiplicity of creatures, cognized by God in a single intuitive act of cognition from all eternity. As a consequence, according to Ockham, God does not even have universal ideas; the only universals in God's mind are the universal concepts of humans existing in God's mind as its objects, just as any other created singular. Given that for Ockham abstraction is not the grasp of a common essence enabling one to have essential cognition of all singulars, but merely the indifferent cognition of any singular, for Ockham the abstractive, universal cognition of any class of singulars is inferior to knowing each fully, intuitively. Thus, this conception, in tune with Ockham's nominalist epistemology not only solves "the simplicity problem" of Divine Ideas but even provides a neat foundation for the claim of the perfection of the divine cognition of creatures.

But the absolutely perfect divine cognition, perfect not only in its mode, but also in its object, is God's self-cognition, which, coupled with self-love, was traditionally construed as constituting the Trinity of divine persons as subsistent relations, distinct on account of their relative opposition, yet each identical to the same nonrelational entity, the divine essence. This doctrine as it stands runs directly counter to Ockham's philosophically motivated program of "ontological reduction." The doctrine essentially demands precisely the types of entities Ockham's program was designed to eliminate (among others), namely, relational entities (in this case, even subsistent, and not merely inherent ones). Ockham's solution is simply to make an exception in the divine case: although there are no created relations signified by relative terms on top of substance and quality, there *are* such uncreated relations, namely, the divine persons, really distinct from one another, and (making *another* exception to his philosophical views) merely formally distinct from the divine essence. To be sure, Ockham may justifiably claim that supernatural relations are "extraordinary." However, this strategy soon becomes suspicious, when this sort of solution becomes the rule rather than the exception, indeed, when the rule simply consists in making exceptions to otherwise universal rules.

Yet, the same strategy is the clearest in the case of Ockham's interpretation of the hypostatic union, i.e., the doctrine of the union of divine and human natures in the person of Christ. On Ockham's proposal, for theologians the nominal definition of the term 'man' would have to be disjunctive, where the first member of this disjunction is true of any human being other than Christ, and the second is true only of Christ.

In Ockham's discussion, it is not clear whether this nominal definition would be an indication that theologians would actually have to have a different concept of humans than, say, Aristotle did, although according to a strong interpretation of his doctrine of nominal definitions, he would be committed to this implication. In any case, his great follower, the Parisian philosopher John Buridan would explicitly draw a similar conclusion in connection with the theological doctrine of the Eucharist: according to Buridan, Aristotle must have had a different concept of accidents from that of Christian theologians.

Accordingly, even if Ockham is *not* the religious heretic, philosophical skeptic, or general destroyer of the scholastic synthesis that later (mostly Catholic) critics of his nominalism tend to depict him as, nevertheless, Ockham's nominalism does point in the direction of the modern separation of religious (theological) and secular (philosophical and scientific) discourse, the synthesis of which was one of the important achievements of the great metaphysical-theological systems of the 13th century, especially, of the system of Thomas Aquinas.[20]

Notes

1 "… quaestio 'an est' praecedit quaestionem 'quid est'. Sed non potest ostendi de aliquo an sit, nisi prius intelligatur quid significatur per nomen."– "… the question of whether something is precedes the question of what it is; but one cannot show of something whether it is, unless it is first understood what is signified by [its] name." Aquinas, *Expositio Posteriorum*, lib. 1 l. 2 n. 5

2 "Deum omnes intellegunt, quo nihil melius. Nam cum ille unus cogitatur deorum Deus, ab his etiam qui alios et suspicantur et vocant et colunt deos sive in caelo sive in terra, ita cogitatur ut aliquid quo nihil sit melius atque sublimius illa cogitatio conetur attingere. Sane quoniam diversis moventur bonis, partim eis quae ad corporis sensum, partim eis quae ad animi intellegentiam pertinent, illi qui dediti sunt corporis sensibus, aut ipsum caelum aut quod in caelo fulgentissimum vident, aut ipsum mundum Deum deorum esse arbitrantur. Aut, si extra mundum ire contendunt, aliquid lucidum imaginantur idque vel infinitum vel ea forma quae optima videtur, inani suspicione constituunt, aut humani corporis figuram cogitant, si eam ceteris anteponunt. Quod si unum Deum deorum esse non putant et potius multos aut innumerabiles aequalis ordinis deos, etiam eos tamen prout cuique aliquid corporis videtur excellere, ita figuratos animo tenent. Illi autem qui per intellegentiam pergunt videre quod Deus est, omnibus eum naturis visibilibus et corporalibus, intellegibilibus vero et spiritalibus, omnibus mutabilibus praeferunt. Omnes tamen certatim pro excellentia Dei dimicant, nec quisquam inveniri potest qui hoc Deum credat esse quo est aliquid melius. Itaque omnes hoc Deum esse consentiunt quod ceteris rebus omnibus anteponunt." Translated by the Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw; Excerpted from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series One, Volume 2; Edited by Philip Schaff, New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

3 Cf. Klima, G. (2000b), "Saint Anselm's Proof: A Problem of Reference, Intentional Identity and Mutual Understanding", in: G. Hintikka (ed.): *Medieval Philosophy and Modern Times*, Proceedings of "Medieval and

Modern Philosophy of Religion", Boston University, August 25-27, 1992; Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, pp. 69-88. and Klima, G. (2011b), "On whether *id quo nihil maius cogitari potest* is in the understanding", in: Klima, G. and Hall, A. (eds.), *The Immateriality of the Human Mind, the Semantics of Analogy, and the Conceivability of God*, Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics, Vol. 1, Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011, pp. 93-106.

4 For more on this issue, see Roark (2003), "Conceptual Closure in Anselm's Proof", *History and Philosophy of Logic*, 24 (2003), 1–14, and my reply, Klima (2003) "Conceptual Closure in Anselm's Proof: Reply to Tony Roark", *History and Philosophy of Logic*, 24 (2003), pp. 131–134.

5 Unde patet quod catholicus dicens idolum non esse deum contradicit pagano hoc asserenti, quia uterque utitur hoc nomine deus ad significandum verum deum. Cum enim paganus dicit idolum esse deum, non utitur hoc nomine secundum quod significat deum opinabilem, sic enim verum diceret, cum enim catholici interdum in tali significatione hoc nomine utantur, ut cum dicitur, omnnes dii gentium sunt daemona." ST1 q.13. a.10. ad 1-um.

6 … dato quod ab omnibus per hoc nomen Deus intelligatur aliquid quo maius cogitari non possit, non necesse erit aliquid esse quo maius cogitari non potest in rerum natura. Eodem enim modo necesse est poni rem et nominis rationem. Ex hoc autem quod mente concipitur quod profertur hoc nomine Deus, non sequitur Deum esse, nisi in intellectu.Unde nec oportebit id quo maius cogitari non potest esse, nisi in intellectu. Et ex hoc non sequitur quod sit aliquid in rerum natura quo maius cogitari non possit. Et sic nihil inconveniens accidit ponentibus Deum non esse: non enim inconveniens est quolibet dato vel in re vel in intellectu aliquid maius cogitari posse, nisi ei qui concedit esse aliquid quo maius cogitari non possit in rerum natura" ScG 1.11.

7 Much of this section, with slight modifications, comes from Klima (2000b).

8 For a more detailed discussion of both the example and its implication concerning inter-faith dialogue, see Klima (2008) "The "Grammar" of 'God' and 'Being': Making Sense of Talking about the One True God in Different Metaphysical Traditions", in D. Z. Phillips (ed.), *Whose God? Which Tradition?* Ashgate Publishing Company: Aldershot, pp. 53–77.

9 "Nam divina substantia omnem formam quam intellectus noster attingit, sua immensitate excedit: et sic ipsam apprehendere non possumus cognoscendo quid est. Sed aliqualem eius habemus notitiam cognoscendo quid non est." *Summa Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 14 n. 2.

10 "cognitio nostra est adeo debilis quod nullus philosophus potuit unquam perfecte investigare naturam unius muscae: unde legitur, quod unus philosophus fuit triginta annis in solitudine, ut cognosceret naturam apis" *In Symbolum Apostolorum*, pr. extum Taurini 1954 editum et automato translatum a Roberto Busa SJ in taenias magneticas denuo recognovit Enrique Alarcón atque instruxit

11 Cf. Klima (2021) "The Hylomorphism of Aquinas and Contemporary Metaphysics", *Divinitas*, 1(62). ISSN: 0012-4222; pp. 175–189.

12 Ad intellectum librorum beati Dionysii considerandum est quod ea quae de Deo in sacris Scripturis continentur, artificialiter quadrifariam divisit: nam in libro quodam, qui apud nos non habetur, qui intitulatur de divinis hypotyposibus idest characteribus, ea de Deo tradidit quae ad unitatem divinae essentiae et distinctionem personarum pertinent. Cuius unitatis et distinctionis sufficiens similitudo in rebus creatis non invenitur, sed hoc mysterium omnem naturalis rationis facultatem excedit. Quae vero dicuntur de

Deo in Scripturis, quarum aliqua similitudo in creaturis invenitur, dupliciter se habent. Nam huiusmodi similitudo in quibusdam quidem attenditur secundum aliquid quod a Deo in creaturas derivatur. Sicut a primo bono sunt omnia bona et a primo vivo sunt omnia viventia et sic de aliis similibus. Et talia pertractat Dionysius in libro de divinis nominibus, quem prae manibus habemus. In quibusdam vero similitudo attenditur secundum aliquid a creaturis in Deum translatum. Sicut Deus dicitur leo, petra, sol vel aliquid huiusmodi; sic enim Deus symbolice vel metaphorice nominatur. Et de huiusmodi tractavit Dionysius in quodam suo libro quem de symbolica theologia intitulavit. Sed quia omnis similitudo creaturae ad Deum deficiens est et hoc ipsum quod Deus est omne id quod in creaturis invenitur excedit, quicquid in creaturis a nobis cognoscitur a Deo removetur, secundum quod in creaturis est; ut sic, post omne illud quod intellectus noster ex creaturis manuductus de Deo concipere potest, hoc ipsum quod Deus est remaneat occultum et ignotum. Non solum enim Deus non est lapis aut sol, qualia sensu apprehenduntur, sed nec est talis vita aut essentia qualis ab intellectu nostro concipi potest et sic hoc ipsum quod Deus est, cum excedat omne illud quod a nobis apprehenditur, nobis remanet ignotum. De huiusmodi autem remotionibus quibus Deus remanet nobis ignotus et occultus fecit alium librum quem intitulavit de mystica idest occulta theologia. *De divinis nominibus, prooemium.* Textum Taurini 1950 editum et automato translatum a Roberto Busa SJ in taenias magneticas denuo recognovit Enrique Alarcón atque instruxit.

13 For a somewhat more precise characterization of what I mean by "the match between the conceptual and real orders," which I sometimes refer to as "the modistic principle," see Klima, G. (2011) "Being", Lagerlund, H. *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, Springer: Dordrecht, pp. 150–159, and Klima, G. (2011) "Two Summulae, Two Ways of Doing Logic: Peter of Spain's 'realism' and John Buridan's 'nominalism'", in Cameron, Margaret – Marenbon, John (eds.): *Methods and Methodologies: Aristotelian logic East and West, 500–1500*, Brill Academic Publishers: Leiden-Boston, pp. 109–126.

14 Cf. Klima, G. (2000a) "Aquinas on One and Many", *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale*, 11(2000), pp. 195–215.

15 Cf. Scotus, John Duns (1950) *Opera Omnia*. Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Civitas Vaticana: Ord., 1, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1–2, n. 26–56, and Dumont (1998) Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus. In: Marenbon J (ed.) *Medieval philosophy*. Routledge, London-New York, pp 291–328.

16 The previous paragraphs in this section come from Klima, G. (2011) "Being", Lagerlund, H. *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, Springer: Dordrecht, pp. 150-159. For more discussion, see that paper. See also Hochschild (2011) "Cajetan on Scotus on Univocity", in Klima, G – Hall, A. *Medieval Metaphysics, or is it "Just Semantics"?*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 41–54.

17 Super Sent., lib. 2 d. 3 q. 1 a. 1 ad 2. Ad secundum dicendum, quod aliqua sunt unius generis logice loquendo, quae naturaliter non sunt unius generis, sicut illa quae communicant in intentione generis quam logicus inspicit, et habent diversum modum essendi: unde in 10 Metaph. dicitur, quod de corruptibilibus et incorruptibilibus nihil commune dicitur, nisi communitate nominis: et ideo non oportet Angelos cum corporalibus eadem principia communicare, nisi secundum intentionem tantum, prout in omnibus invenitur potentia et actus, analogice tamen, ut in 12 Metaph. dicitur.

18 For more on this issue, see for example Cross (2001) "Where Angels Fear to Tread," *Antonianum* 76 (2001): 7-41; Ross J. and Bates T. "Duns Scotus on Natural Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams, 193-237 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Williams (2005) "The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutary," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 4 (2005): 575–85.

19 For an interesting re-thinking of these customary charges, see: Lee Jr. (2001) "Being Skeptical about Skepticism: Methodological Themes concerning Ockham's Alleged Skepticism", in: *Vivarium* 39(1) (2001) 1-19. See also "… Buridan was a committed Nominalist. He was, in other words, on the philosophically wrong side of the major metaphysical controversy of the Middle Ages. Like Ockham, he believed there were no universals: strictly speaking, no colours, only coloured things; no virtue, only virtuous people; no circularity, only individual circles. The rest was all just hot air (*flatus vocis*). The Nominalists ended up poisoning the well of sound philosophy with scepticism, relativism, agnosticism and even atheism. Fortunately, Realism was not sent to rout and has many exponents in present-day analytic philosophy." Oderberg (2003) "Review of John Buridan: Summulae de Dialectica", *Times Literary Supplement*, June 6, 2003, p. 9. For a discussion of this sort of charge in the case of Buridan, see Klima, G. "The Essentialist Nominalism of John Buridan", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 58(2005), pp. 301–315.

20 Much of this section comes from Klima (2021) "William Ockham", in: Goetz, S. – Taliaferro, C. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, John Wiley and Sons: Hoboken, NJ, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119009924.eopr0275

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5 Anselmian Classical Theism

Katherin Rogers

Classical theism—the view of God and creation proposed by influential philosophers such as St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas—raises some difficult puzzles. St. Anselm of Canterbury, taking Augustine as his master, and prefiguring Thomas in his more analytic approach, offers a somewhat different version of classical theism than either of these two. He accepts many of the commitments of Augustine and Thomas, with attendant puzzles, but takes a different tack on the nature of free will. He holds that divine freedom allows that God inevitably does the best, but regarding human freedom he proposes that human beings must have what we would today call "libertarian" freedom. This understanding of divine freedom fits well with classical theism, but Anselm's view of human free will exacerbates the problems with painting a coherent portrait of the God of classical theism. I argue in the present paper that at least some of the difficulties can be mitigated by adopting a particular understanding of divine eternity and the nature of time. Here, again, Anselm differs from Augustine and Thomas—or, at least, sets out the view more clearly than they do. Anselm does not spell out the problems and possible responses just the way I will here, but I base my discussion on concepts found in his work and on his basic "perfect being theology" methodology.

At the beginning of his *Proslogion* (Chapter 2) Anselm writes that God is "that than which no greater can be conceived" (TTW for short). That understanding allowed him to move immediately to the existence of God: TTW exists in the understanding (otherwise we couldn't get any farther in the argument since we wouldn't know what we were talking about). But a being existing *only* in the understanding would be less great than one in the understanding *and* in extra-mental reality. QED (for quod erat demonstratum). The famous "ontological" argument has had its critics and its defenders over the centuries. One critic contemporary with Anselm, Gaunilo of Marmoutier, argued that it is a mistake to say that God, TTW, exists in the understanding. An important element of Anselm's classical theism is that in one sense he agrees with Gaunilo. He explains in his response to Gaunilo that indeed we cannot *comprehend*

God—we cannot imagine what He is like or wrap our minds around God.[1] Nonetheless we can conceive of TTW—we can understand the meaning of the term and what it is likely to entail, at least enough to see what cannot be TTW.[2] He appeals to the (ubiquitous in the Middle Ages) analogy of the sun and its light. We cannot gaze directly at the sun without being blinded, but we can see its light reflected on things. Thus, in trying to address the puzzles of classical theism in general, and Anselm's classical theism in particular, if the Anselmian approach suggests views that are difficult, or impossible, to *imagine* that should not count against those views.

After showing, in *Proslogion* Chapter 2, that God must exist, Anselm tries to make good on the claim that we can, to some extent, conceive of TTW. The subsequent chapters of the work aim to unpack this notion of TTW, ascribing to God all of the properties which it is simply better to have than to lack. Anselm is careful to note that we ascribe properties, in the plural, only from our limited perspective. God must be absolutely simple. This Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS) was a nonnegotiable plank in the system of classical theism. Anselm gives the standard argument: A being composed of parts is in some way dependent on those parts, whereas TTW must be completely independent (*Monologion* 17). Moreover, he adds an argument based on how we must think of God: a being composed of parts can be "decomposed" if only in the understanding. But TTW cannot even be thought to fail, or to cease, to exist, so God must be simple (*Pros.* 18).[3] This view of divine simplicity entails that TTW must be immutable in a very strong way. What He knows and does in His simple act of being cannot change at all. And TTW must be omnipotent—the immediate cause of the existence of everything that exists except for Himself. As simple, his causing is his knowing such that He knows immediately every*thing* and every event, past, present, and future. And, of course, TTW must be perfectly good. It is not that He conforms to moral principles, but that He Himself, His very nature—which is His act of doing and knowing—is the standard for all good. All that is good in creation reflects and participates in the Goodness of God.[4]

Insisting on this list of divine attributes raises numerous puzzles. To offer a few examples: If God is simple, is He free to do other than He does? If so there looks to be a "part" of God, His basic nature, which cannot be other than it is, and another "part" which could have been doing and knowing other than God is actually doing and knowing. And this conflicts with DDS. But if God does not act freely, in what sense is He good? And isn't being free just an intrinsically good quality such that, if God is not free, He is lacking some good and so is not TTW? If God is immutable how can He possibly be causing and knowing a changing world? Can He even know what time it is now, since it appears that His knowledge of the time would have to now be different from what it was

five minutes ago. Difficult questions indeed. Anselm, as I interpret him, compounds these difficulties by defending a libertarian view of free will for created agents.[5] And, even more problematic, he argues that God responds to human choices. The very ambitious goal of his *Cur Deus Homo* is to show that God "had to" become incarnate to save fallen humanity.[6] How in the world can an eternal and immutable God respond to human free choices?

Some, at least, of the difficulties can be mitigated by adopting a particular understanding of divine eternity and the nature of time. Anselm is, I believe, the first to clearly articulate this view of time and eternity.[7] First I will spell out the theory, then show how embracing it can answer some of the puzzling problems with Anselmian classical theism. Anselm discusses divine eternity in his *Monologion* (Chapters 18–25) and *Proslogion* (Chapters 18–20). God's life is without any kind of extension. It is not divided into past, present, and future. It is simple and immutable. And all the moments of created time are immediately present to divine eternity. The clearest proof-text for his theory occurs in his last finished work, the *De concordia* (*On the Harmony of Divine Foreknowledge and Predestination and Grace with Free Will*) (1.5).[8] Here, in attempting to solve the problem of divine foreknowledge of creaturely free choices, he writes,

> Just as something in eternity neither was nor will be but just is, and nevertheless it was or will be in time without any contradiction, in the same way that which cannot change in eternity, in time at some temporal point before it happened, is shown to be changeable through free will without any inconsistency.[9] However, although nothing is there [in eternity] but what is present, it is not a temporal present like ours; but an eternal [present] in which all times are contained. Just as the present time contains all place and whatever is in any place, in the same way the eternal present encloses all time and whatever exists in any time. For eternity has its own unique simultaneity (*Habet enim aeternitas suum simul*) in which exist all the things which exist at the same place or time, and whatever exists in the different places and times.

Just as a moment of time, T1, is "there" to all of the spatial objects and events existing at T1, so all the moments of time are "there" to divine eternity.[10] All times are equally present to God. And since it is God's perspective that causes everything to exist immediately, all times are equally real. What is, to some limited temporal perceiver, the past, or present, or future is subjective to that perceiver. It is this view of time that is assumed in most time-travel stories. The time-traveler at T1 can go back to T-5 or forward to T5 because those times are "there" in reality, even if they are not "now" for someone at T1. Should the

time-traveler go back to T-5 or forward to T5, T-5, or T5, becomes "now" for him.[11] This view is sometimes called "eternalism," but that is an unfortunate label since it might encourage the mistaken conflation of the temporally extended mode of being of the created universe with divine eternity. It is sometimes called "four-dimensionalism"; physical objects exist in three dimensions of space and a fourth dimension of time. This is not an ideal term, either. It seems to put a limit on how many spatial dimensions there can be, which may be a mistake. Moreover, in Anselm's universe there are nonphysical, temporal beings.[12] I will label Anselm's view "isotemporalism" to emphasize the point that all times exist *equally*.

Some critics see this theory as thinking of the created universe as a static, unchanging "block," and find this an unwholesome picture of reality. But it is a mistake to think that isotemporalism denies change. At least one very plausible understanding of what it is for something to change is for it to be one way at one time and a different way at another.[13] It is true that the created universe as a whole cannot change. Time is a category within creation, and if all moments of time exist within the whole, the whole of what there is does not exist at particular times, so it cannot be different "at one time" than it is at another. Reality just is what it is. But there is nothing in isotemporalism to conflict with the fact of change within the universe; some temporal thing can be one way at T1 and another at T5. And "block" may just be a rhetorically unappealing way of saying that things are as they are. And surely they are. Nor does the isotemporalist need to deny the thought that some things really happen before others, at the same time as others, and after others. Discussing physics, one may point to the image of the broken teacup reassembling itself and hopping back on the table to illustrate the point that, as far as the mathematical equations are concerned, there is no objective "arrow of time" from the "before" to the "after." Were that picture a necessary consequence of isotemporalism the Christian theist might have to reject the theory, since Christianity entails real "histories," both for the universe and for the individual. But the Christian theist will not suppose that the mathematical equations that describe the subject matter of physics capture all of reality. Perhaps the arrow of time can be grounded in the fact of histories—or more generally in causation that is more robust than mere constant conjunction. However we ground the arrow of time, insisting on the reality of "before" and "after" does not undermine the view that all moments of time are equally real and equally present to God's eternity.

Phenomenologically, isotemporalism is hard. The you of five minutes ago and the you of five minutes hence are "there" in the universe, just as real as the you "now" (from your perspective now).[14] But the nature of time is one of those great philosophical issues where all developed approaches lead to strange positions. Moreover, as noted above, within

Anselmian methodology, if a view better supports the greatness of God, it is to be adopted, even if it transcends our human imaginative abilities. We can conceive of isotemporalism enough to use it in our theory-construction. And isotemporalism does fit much better with Anselm's claim that God is TTW than do other theories of time. Take presentism, the view that what is real, and all that is real – God included – exists only at the present moment.[15] In that case divine omnipotence is severely limited; God can act immediately only on what exists at the present moment. On isotemporalism God's power reaches to everything at all times. Similarly with divine omniscience. In a presentist universe God can "immediately perceive" only what exists at the present. He must remember the past and look forward to the future.[16] Isotemporalism proposes that God knows everything at all times and knows it not through some causal process of perception, but by immediately causing it to be – clearly a more robust understanding of divine omniscience. An alternative theory of time might be to appeal to the relativity of time: just as the speeding space-traveler may perceive time differently from the earth-bound human being, so God may perceive time differently from the temporal creature. The difficulty with this approach, on classical theism, is that God, being TTW, is not just one among other perceivers. God's "perception" is the absolute and immediate source of all that exists. If God "sees" things a certain way, that is how they are. The isotemporalist claim is that God, being eternal, "sees" all times as equally real, and so they are.

Not only does this view of time and eternity fit better with the greatest omnipotence and omniscience, it also helps to solve some puzzles and diminish apparent conflicts within classical theism. Let us start with divine simplicity and immutability. What about the puzzle of an unchanging God being able to know what time it is *now*. The isotemporalist solution allows us to say that there is no absolute "now" for God to know. God can know that at T-5 the clock reads T-5, and He can know that some temporal perceiver looking at the clock at T-5 sees what it says and believes that "Now it is T-5." Then at T1 the clock reads T1, and God knows that at T1 the clock says T1, and at T5 the clock says T5, etc. But all of these times, and all times, are equally real. God knows all the moments in one simple act, and there is no privileged "now" for God to know.

On isotemporalism God can interact with a changing universe without Himself undergoing any change. For example, say that at T-5 Moses is speaking to God in the burning bush. And then at T1 Moses is leading the people through the sea dry-shod. Moses, and pretty much the rest of creation, is one way at T-5 and a different way at T1. Things have changed considerably. But T-5 and T1 are equally present to God and God speaks from the burning bush and parts the sea in one act.[17] Moses changes, God does not.

And isotemporalism allows for a solution to the dilemma of divine foreknowledge of free choices. This is a pressing question for Anselm, who insists that human agents must have libertarian free will. This view sets Anselm apart from Augustine and Thomas, and a brief discussion of his libertarianism will help to explain his version of classical theism, and to set the stage for possible solutions to the problems his classical theism raises. Augustine is certainly what we might call a compatibilist in his later works, and arguably a compatibilist all along.[18] The same can be said for St. Thomas.[19] Here I am operating with the term "compatibilism" in a way tailored to the present discussion. "Theistic compatibilism" means that it is God who makes it the case that the human agent—call him S—chooses as he chooses, but nevertheless S is held to be free and responsible. S can still be said to choose "willingly" since the divine primary causing of the choice operates through the secondary causing of the agent's will.[20]

A hard problem with this theist compatibilism is what to make of sin. Isn't sin disobedience to the will of God? But if God is the ultimate cause of the choice, how can it be against His will? St. Thomas proposes two "wills" in God. There is the will by which He issues divine commandments which ought to be obeyed. But there is His "all things considered" will, by which He wills choices, even sinful choices, as part of the overall divine plan. It is not that God wills "evil," since evil per se is just nothing, and the divine plan is good. Still, God wills the actual act of sin.[21] Whether or not such an approach had been suggested before Anselm's day, Anselm never mentions it, and what he does say shows that he could not accept it. Anselm understands sin to be choosing against the will of God, simpliciter. Sin is not a divinely willed part of God's plan; something that from the overall perspective is really a good thing, a thing that should happen. No. Sin should not happen. God, of course, permits it and can work it into the divine plan, but He does not cause it. In fact, Anselm argues that it is *logically impossible* that God should cause the choice to sin. To sin is to will what God wills that you not will. Whatever God causes, He causes willingly, and He cannot will that you should will what He wills that you not will.[22]

Sin happens, so it must be up to the created agent that he chooses badly, since it cannot be up to God. And, in order to be free and responsible, human agents must have the option to choose well or badly. Why? The possibility of choosing to sin enables the created agent to "keep justice on his own." The classical theist picture of divine omnipotence entails that God is the source of our existence and our properties, but the created agent can have a dim reflection of divine independence by being able to hold fast to the good on his own when he might fail to do so. In order to be able to choose from himself, *a se*, the created agent must have open, morally significant, options. But Anselm deliberately rejects the inclusion of open, morally significant, options in

the *definition* of free will since he wants a definition that fits both God and created agents. God is perfect good and the standard for good. He exists in absolute independence and so does not need options. "Free will" is just the ability to keep justice for its own sake. God is Justice itself, but created agents "hold fast" to justice when they choose in accordance with God's will.

Libertarian free will for created agents is hard to fit into the universe of classical theism. On the theory that takes God to be TTW divine omnipotence entails that God is the immediate source of the existence of everything that exists at the time it exists. Augustine and Thomas take this to mean that, since an act of will—even a choice to sin—is a "thing" of some sort, it must be caused by God. As I interpret him, Anselm attempts to address this issue with an extremely clever, if somewhat complex, analysis of the mechanics of a free choice.[23] Setting out his view in detail would take us too far afield, but the bottom line is that God causes everything that has genuine ontological status in the choice. God causes the being of the agent including the agent's faculty of willing. And God causes the agent's competing, morally significant, motivations and desires. (Let us suppose that there are only two for simplicity's sake.) They must be competing since otherwise the agent would not need to choose. This situation in which the agent is struggling to pursue two competing desires can be called the "torn condition," and whatever has ontological status in this condition is immediately caused by God's primary causation. But the act of choosing is simply the pursuing of one God-given desire over another, such that one desire becomes the intention and the other ceases to be viable. And this "pursuing" is up to the created agent. The "act" of choosing is a "thin" event, that is, it has no ontological status of its own, apart from the agent, the agent's will, and the agent's desires. The choice, while it may be very important, does not add to the sum of existents in the universe. So God is the cause of all that *exists* in the universe, but not the cause of all that *happens* (Rogers 2015, pp. 102–9). There are powerful reasons to hold that God is the absolute source of all that exists and also to ascribe libertarian free will to created agents. Anselm's attempted reconciliation of these two apparently incompatible claims is at the very least a worthy effort. And maybe it does the job.

There are further problems with positing libertarian freedom for created agents in the classical theist universe. If sin is really the dark evil that God does not cause, then God's sovereignty is not absolute. There are events in the universe that God does not will or cause. There is no escaping this claim on Anselm's view. God permits sinful choices and works them into the divine plan. If created agents are free, how can God construct this divine plan? Robust sovereignty, given the freedom of created agents, entails that God knows all that will happen in the future, including the free choices of created agents.[24] (As does being omniscient

in the way TTW must be omniscient.) But here again, the ascription of libertarian freedom to created agents presents a problem. If it is up to the created agent which option he chooses at T1, how can God know beforehand, at T-5, what the agent will choose? (Balking at the phrasing of the problem as "God knowing at T-5," since God is not bound by time, does not solve the problem. If God, in His eternity which transcends all times, knows that some agent, S, chooses X at T1, then it is true at T-5 that S chooses X at T1, and nothing S can do at T1 changes that.)

So the dilemma of freedom and divine foreknowledge can be expressed this way (following Augustine's *On Free Will* 3.2-4): If God knows at T-5 that S will choose X at T1, then, when it gets to be T1, S cannot choose other than X. But then it looks to be necessary that S choose X, and a choice made by necessity is not free. Augustine made a start on an adequate response by noting that the "necessity" of S choosing X at T1 is a consequence of the definition of the term "know." Among the criteria for an object of belief's being *known* is that it must be *true*. If anyone (not just God) knows X, then necessarily X, simply by what it means to know. But merely knowing something does not make it to happen. The dilemma, as Augustine had stated it, equivocates on the term "necessary" and its cognates. There is the necessity entailed by "know," a consequent, logical necessity that does not conflict with free will. If I know you are reading, necessarily you are reading, but you might be reading freely. And then there is the sort of causal "necessity" that conflicts with free will. The stone, thrown into the air, falls as a matter of causal necessity, not willingly. Boethius, building on Augustine's start on a solution, agrees that the "necessity" entailed by God's knowledge of future free choices is merely a consequent necessity. But that leaves unanswered the question of *how* God could know future free choices. Boethius furthers the solution to the dilemma by pointing out that God is eternal, seeing all times as if they were immediately present to Him.[25] However, he does not try to work libertarian freedom for created agents into his analysis. How does God know future free choices? He knows them by knowing what He Himself will cause. Boethius again makes the theist compatibilist move. The human agent chooses willingly, so he is free—not like the sun that must traverse the sky as a matter of natural necessity—but God causes the willed act of choice.

It is Anselm who proposes to reconcile divine foreknowledge with libertarian free will. If it is truly up to the agent what he chooses, then the actual choice must be the "ground" of the truth of what is chosen and of knowledge of what is chosen (Rogers 2015, pp. 109–16). The free agent's choice must be—in some sense—the source of God's knowledge. And here is where Anselm's analysis of time and eternity can provide a solution. If all times are equally real, and are all immediately present to God, then God knows immediately and eternally all the free choices made at all the times the universe exists.[26] It is true that if S chooses X

at T1, and God eternally knows that S chooses X at T1, then, when, for S, it gets to be T1, S cannot choose otherwise than X. There is a sense in which it is necessary that S choose X at T1. But here "and God eternally knows that agent S chooses X at T1" is not the source of any necessity – either consequent or causal. It is S's choice that is the source of the consequent necessity – if S chooses X at T1, then S chooses X at T1. Anselm—argues that, in terms of abilities or strengths, the agent, before the choice, has the innate power to pursue either of the morally significant open options. That is how the choice can be up to the agent. But all the choices of all the agents at all times exist in the isotemporal universe and it is just logically impossible that, if S chooses X at T1, S can fail to choose X at T1. But freedom surely does not require that the agent be able to circumvent the laws of logic. (Rogers 2008, pp. 169–84)

But even if this solution looks plausible, the classical theist is not satisfied yet. As I interpret Anselm, he holds that God causes everything with ontological status, but He does not cause all that happens. But divine omniscience entails that God *knows* all that happens. If God knows what the free created agent chooses because of the actual choice, which is up to the agent, doesn't that mean that the creature has some kind of causal impact on the Creator? Positing isotemporalism does not address the problem that the arrow of causation, on this attempted solution to the dilemma of freedom and divine foreknowledge, runs from creature to Creator. And classical theism has it that God is perfect act, with no unrealized potentials. How, then, can the creature act causally upon the Creator?

Anselm himself does not take up this issue, but a possible approach lies in appreciating how he would understand causation. On the Anselmian picture, there is no way around holding that the created free agent's choice provides a counter-factual explanation for God's knowledge of the choice. God knows that S chooses X because S chooses X, and had S not chosen X God would not know that S chose X. But the Medieval understanding of causation—both primary and secondary—involves the exercise of some power by the cause producing some effect in the recipient. (Of course, primary and secondary causation work very differently. Primary causation is perhaps better expressed by saying it produces the *existence* of the recipient, rather than that it produces an effect "in" the recipient.) Causation involves some force, or "oomph" "transferred" from the cause to the caused. Anselm's analysis of the mechanics of human free will would allow him to explain divine knowledge of human choices without ascribing this sort of causal power over God to the created agent. All that exists in the process of a choice – the agent, the agent's will, the agent's desires – have ontological status and are immediately caused to exist by God. All that is up to the agent is which desire is pursued to the point of intention, resulting in the other desire ceasing to be viable. Suppose we hold that God knows what

S chooses by knowing which desire/intention He Himself keeps in being? God eternally knows what S chooses by knowing what He Himself causes in His one simple act. It is "up to" the created agent that God causes these things rather than those—still the created agent does not exercise any real causal power on God.[27]

Augustine and Thomas would be shocked at the claim that what God causes is "up to" the created agent in the way I am proposing.[28] Perhaps Anselm would object to the claim, as well. Given the DDS this consequence looks to entail that created agents are in some way responsible for the way God is. But it seems unavoidable if Anselm is indeed a libertarian, as I take him to be. Moreover, the thesis of his *Cur Deus Homo* is that God "had to" become incarnate due to the fall of humankind. Combine that with Anselm's very clear insistence that the choice to sin happens and is not caused by God, indeed it is logically impossible that God causes the choice to sin. The result is that God responds to the choices of created agents. If this result can stand without being coupled to the thought that our choices exercise some causal *impact* on God, that may be the best that can be done to reconcile libertarian free will with classical theism.

A further worry with Anselm's portrait of the divine arises due to the claim noted just above, that God "had to" become incarnate. If God is TTW, then shouldn't we hold that He is free to do other than He does? First, it seems intrinsically impossible that an eternal God, identical to His simple, timeless act, could be doing other than He is actually doing.[29] And divine simplicity generates another problem: if God could do other than He does, then there seem to be at least two "parts" to God, His basic nature that could not be other than it is, and His act of doing and knowing, which would have been otherwise if He had done and known differently.[30] Thomas holds that God could have done other than He does. He could have chosen to create another universe or not to create at all. His solution to the questions about divine eternity and simplicity is that God is in every respect exactly the same whatever He is said to do and know. If God had chosen to make a different creation, that would be a fact about the created world, not about God. This "solution" is deeply puzzling.[31] Thomas can respond that we should expect to be puzzled when trying to think about God. His doctrine of analogy—on at least some interpretations—entails that we can never conceptualize anything about God without equivocation. Anselm is rather more positive. Our inability to comprehend the divine nature does not bar us from being able to apply concepts univocally to God—we can look at sunlight even if we cannot gaze directly into the sun. From an Anselmian perspective, the Thomist approach that God's doing and knowing vis-à-vis creation make absolutely no difference to God distances God too far from creation. But what about the problem of divine freedom and divine simplicity? In the very brief exposition of Anselm's

analysis of free will above I noted that, while the definition of "freedom of choice" is the same for God and created agents, the way that freedom works out is very different. Human beings, who exist in total dependence on God, need open options in order to choose "from themselves," but God exists in perfect independence. He does not choose to conform to justice, He is the standard of Justice itself. It is impossible for God to choose other than the good. And, at least arguably, Anselm's position is that God "must" will what is best. That is the assumption driving the argument in *Cur Deus Homo*, and Anselm repeatedly insists, in response to questions from his interlocutor in that dialogue, that the ability to choose otherwise is *not* essential for divine freedom. So it is reasonable to interpret Anselm as holding that God, being perfectly good, cannot fail to create, and to create this world (Rogers 2008, pp. 185–205). Is ours the best *possible* world? Perhaps not, in that human free choices are part of the landscape of the universe. (Though more on possible worlds below.) But it is the best world God can actualize, working with created freedom.[32] So God, in eternity, could not be doing or knowing other than He is doing and knowing and there is no distinction between God's basic nature and divine activities that could have been otherwise.

But wait! If God responds to the free choices of created agents, and creaturely free will requires open options, isn't it the case that all sorts of things could have been other than they are, such that God would be doing and knowing other than He is doing and knowing? Not really. In order to see why not we need to reconcile libertarian free will with isotemporalism. How can we understand "open options" on isotemporalism? All choices at all the moments of time exist equally such that, if S chooses X at T1, then from the dawn of time it has been a truth about the universe that "S chooses X at T1." And God knows in His eternity, present to all of time, that S chooses X at T1. We have already insisted that if S chooses X at T1, then, by the law of non-contradiction, at T1, S cannot actually be choosing other than X. S certainly cannot choose otherwise *after* T1, since he has already chosen X. Nor can he actually be choosing otherwise *before* T1, since he cannot be choosing before he is choosing. What does it mean to say that S has open options such that he can, or could have, chosen otherwise than X? On the Anselmian account, the ability to "choose otherwise" is just that – an ability, a causal *power* possessed by the agent as he is in the torn condition struggling to pursue, simultaneously, two competing desires. From the perspective of the agent's, S's, abilities before T1, as he is in the torn condition, he could pursue the desire for X or the desire for Y. There is absolutely nothing hindering him from pursuing the desire for Y to the point where it becomes an intention, in which case the desire for X would cease to be viable and we would say that "S chose Y at T1." This is what it means to say that S "could have chosen otherwise." But as it happens, S chooses X at T1, which T1 exists equally with all other

moments of time. It is wholly up to S that "S chooses X at T1" is always true and eternally known by God. This is quite enough to render created agents robustly free. Isotemporalism does not conflict with libertarian free will.

Combining isotemporalism with the position that God inevitably does the best, does entail the so-called "modal collapse." Reality, all of reality, all things that exist and all events that happen, are as they are and cannot be other than they are. Nonactual "possible worlds" are, at most, consistent sets of propositions, where propositions about the actual world which might render the set inconsistent are just bracketed so as not to be included.[33] Independent of actuality, possible worlds have no ontological status, Lewisian or otherwise. Counter-factual statements, if they have truth values, must be translatable into statements about the actual world. "If I were you, I wouldn't do that" just means that I actually think it is a bad idea for you to do that. So things could not be otherwise, and divine simplicity is not threatened by clouds of possibilia of debatable ontological status. Rather than feeling forced to admit this "modal collapse" *sotto voce* and with chagrin, the Anselmian can embrace "modal simplicity" happily. What's done is done, and we need not be troubled by ghosts of "what might have been." And the future is what we make it. Reality is as it is. Period.

Attempting to think about God is a difficult task. One needs to avoid the Scylla of making the divine so distant that it becomes more or less a "nothing" for us. But equally one must avoid the Charybdis of overly anthropomorphizing God, so He becomes a sort of super-scientist. Anselmian classical theism raises some hard puzzles, and the possible solutions to the puzzles present concepts that are perhaps beyond human imagining. But if the various facets of the Anselmian system are understandable to some extent, and if they fit together in a logically consistent way, then the failure of our imaginative faculties should not be held against Anselmian classical theism.[34]

Notes

1 Gaunilo's criticisms and Anselm's responses are usually appended to any version of the *Proslogion* at Anselm's (900-year old) request.
2 Here is my own example: though we cannot imagine what it is like to be omniscient, we can understand the term to some extent. We would know that if there was a fact to be known, God would know it.
3 St. Thomas, though insistent on DDS, does not give this sort of argument, presumably due to his more empiricist approach.
4 I attempt to give more content to the thought that God's omnipotence=His omniscience=His goodness in (Rogers 1996).
5 See my *Anselm on Freedom* (2008) and *Freedom and Self-Creation: Anselmian Libertarianism* (2015).
6 St. Augustine and St. Thomas may have a slightly easier time in that both, arguably, are theistic compatibilists regarding human free will: God causes

our choices as primary cause, and we cause them as secondary causes, but we are nevertheless morally responsible for them. And neither Augustine nor Thomas insist that God responds to human choices, nor do they think that the Incarnation can be shown to have been a necessary response.

7 It may be suggested by Augustine and Boethius and Thomas, but it is not set out clearly, and scholars debate how these philosophers understand time and eternity.

8 For Augustine and Boethius on time and eternity see (Rogers 2008, pp. 158–68). For Anselm see (Rogers 2008, pp. 176-184).

9 Sometimes this sort of claim is read as supposing that every temporal thing exists twice; once in time and once in eternity. This is clearly not Anselm's meaning. He is talking about how God in Eternity knows human free choices, and the choice which is immediately present to God's eternal omniscience is not a doppelganger of the human agent's choice, but the very free choice itself.

10 Here Anselm seems to assume that there is an absolute time for the created universe. I take it that contemporary physics does not see things this way, but I do not believe that affects the point of Anselm's explanation.

11 The modern *locus classicus* for this view is probably (Mctaggart 1908) where he distinguishes between an "A-series" in which the fundamental ordering of temporal events is into past, present, and future, and a "B-series" where there is no metaphysically privileged present moment and it is the ordering of temporal events as earlier or later that counts. Anselm's analysis can be read as an expression of this B-theory.

12 Augustine's meditations on the nature of time do not fit well with thinking of time as a fourth dimension of physical objects. In the *Confessions* XI he suggests that time is our manner of experiencing things and in *De Genesi ad Litteram* 1.9 he places the host of angels on the cusp between time and eternity.

13 Aristotelians apparently take change to be ontologically prior to time and hence will not analyze change in terms of something being different at different times. Anselm, writing before the reception of Aristotle's corpus into Western Europe, was not an Aristotelian, nor was he engaged with Aristotle's work, so we can safely bracket discussion of the Aristotelian view for purposes of the present discussion.

14 Sometimes it is argued that Christians, at least, should not accept isotemporalism, since it entails that the individual exists across all the times at which they exist. (There are different ways of analyzing this temporal extension, but that is an issue beyond the scope of the present paper.) And that means that if you have converted from a life of sin to one of Christian salvation, the old life is never really gone. A possible response is that it is not unwholesome to accept that one is a saved sinner. Moreover, the sinful "part" may be effectively overwhelmed by the everlasting beatitude of the saved individual.

15 William Hasker has defended this view in a number of works. See especially his (Hasker 1989).

16 Hasker, as a proponent of Open Theism, holds that God just does not know what the future holds; see (Hasker, 1989, p. 192).

17 That God's simple act of being, which is also His doing and His knowing, "contains" or "accesses" a vast number, or an infinity, of things is, I think, unavoidable. Even if one makes the Thomist move that God knows all created things by knowing how He can be imitated, there seems to be an intractable multiplicity of ways God can be imitated.

18 See (Rogers 2004).
19 ST 1, Q.83, art.1, ad 3; SCG 1.68. This is a controversial claim. For example, W. Matthews Grant argues that Thomas is a libertarian (Grant 2019). But it is not clear that there is a real disagreement between Grant and myself on how to interpret Thomas. Key to Grant's argument is a very particular (and, in my view, idiosyncratic) understanding of the meaning of the term "libertarian". Grant allows that God is the cause of all created choices, but sees no conflict between this view, which I will call "theistic compatibilism" and his analysis of "libertarian" free will for created agents.
20 Arguably both Augustine and Thomas propose what has been a standard brand of compatibilism. They both seem to accept the thought that the created agent inevitably wills what it most desires or judges to be most beneficial. But since it is operating through its own will, and willing what it wants, it is free and responsible.
21 Hugh McCann has set out and defended this Thomist position in his *Creation and the Sovereignty of God* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012). See (Rogers 2015, p. 23 n. 48) for more sources on this issue.
22 *De libertati arbitrii* 8. St. Thomas's theory suggests that God is a deceiver, and Anselm would never allow such a thing.
23 (Rogers 2015, Chapters 2 and 3). I call Anselm's view a "parsimonious agent causation" theory, though to some extent it prefigures Robert Kane's event causal approach (Kane 1996), especially pages 107–115, in that it proposes a struggle to pursue two competing options.
24 Someone might add that divine omniscience must include "Middle" knowledge of the so-called "counterfactuals of freedom" proposed by contemporary Molinists. These are true propositions about what any libertarian free agent, including merely possible, never to be actualized, agents *would* choose in any possible situation. The Anselmian vociferously denies that there are counterfactuals of freedom. Positing their existence conflicts with divine omnipotence in that they are existents of a sort, yet they exist independently of God's will and constrain His activities. Moreover these counterfactuals of freedom cannot be reconciled with libertarian free will, at least as the Anselmian understands that theory. Libertarianism entails that the truth of how any agent chooses is grounded in how that actual agent actually chooses (Rogers 2015, pp. 109–116). More on this below.
25 *Consolation of Philosophy* Prose 6. It is not clear that Boethius is an iso-temporalist. To say, as he does, that God sees all times "as if" they were present to Him, is not the same as saying that all times really are present to Him.
26 Sometimes it is argued that God's knowing "future" choices because they are present to His eternity does nothing to enhance His sovereignty; the knowledge comes "too late" for Him to change how things turn out. (William Hasker makes this case in (Hasker 1989, pp. 53-63). And that is true. If changing things means making what is the case at a time, not be the case at that time, then even God cannot *change* things. But it does not follow that immediate knowledge of all events at all times does not enhance God's power to *bring things about*. Elsewhere I argue this point using the example of the (mere) time-traveler. Knowing what happens at T does not endow the time-traveler with the ability to change what happens at T, but, depending on the situation, it might allow the time-traveler to go back to T-5 in order to bring about the desired result at T. (The time-traveler is not *changing* what

happens at T-5 or at T, he is just bringing it about. See the film *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* as an example). If the time-traveler's power is enhanced by being able to access different times, then the same is true for God only much more so. Unlike for the time-traveler, God's access to all times is not piecemeal or sequential (see my Rogers 2019). I do not say that this understanding of divine omniscience can be imagined, but it is not incoherent or contradictory.

27 See (Rogers 2019).

28 The choice is "up to" the agent in a way that means it is *not* up to God. Some philosophers argue for a sort of "dual agency" such that any act of human choice is caused by, or "up to", both God and the created agent. See, for example, (Koons 2002) This proposal is not open to the Anselmian. Anselm is adamant that it is logically impossible that God could will for a created agent to sin. So the created agent's choice to sin could not be caused by, or "up to", God in any way at all.

29 Stump and Kretzmann, interpreting St. Thomas, attempt a response by distinguishing between a conditional and an absolute necessity in the will of God. Anselm does not posit such a distinction. See (Stump and Kretzmann 1985). Especially Section 7.

30 I have compared the Thomist and the Anselmian approach in (Rogers 2020)

31 One could argue that, since the content of a human being's thoughts can be partially grounded in facts about his external environment, the content of God's intentions and actions could similarly be grounded in facts about the created world. If this analogy between human and divine knowing is to elucidate the present puzzle it ought to be possible to say that the human's true beliefs, grounded in facts about his environment, would (or could?) remain exactly the same even if the environment were entirely different … or there were no external environment at all. If anything, the analogy seems to underscore the puzzle. And the point that the two sorts of knowing are disanalogous in that it is God's will that is immediately keeping creation in being from moment to moment only seems to exacerbate the difficulty with appealing to this analogy between human and divine knowing. The content of our thoughts might be partially grounded in external reality because our thoughts do not cause external reality. I stand by my view that this attempted solution is deeply puzzling. Note, though, that criticism of this Thomistic solution does not, in itself, entail the thought that there must be, in the mind of God, a set of beliefs copying, or reflecting, creation.

32 One might propose that a best actualizable world is simply impossible. But why say this? A best actualizable world is not obviously incoherent, as I have tried to argue in "Classical Theism and the Multiverse", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 88 (2020): 23-39. Claiming this impossibility is a useful move if one is eager to defend the thought that God can do other than He does, but the Anselmian does not hold open options to be required for divine freedom. The impossibility view might constitute one premise of an argument attempting to deal with the problem of evil. One might suppose that our world is less than the best and then hope to show that God cannot be somehow faulted for not creating the best world, since such a world is just impossible. But this argument suggests that God's will is limited by possibilities not of his own making. Anselm, to the contrary, makes the provocative claim that what is necessary and what is possible are dependent on the divine will (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.17).

33　For example, we might say that there is a possible world in which Napoleon won at Waterloo, but it is "possible" bracketing the fact that he lost.

34　I thank the editors, Jonathan Fuqua and Robert Koons, for very helpful suggestions that have improved the paper significantly.

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6 Thomist Classical Theism: Divine Simplicity within Aquinas' *Triplex Via Theology*

Daniel De Haan

6.1 Some Problems for Classical Theism

A central challenge for *CT* is explaining how we can arrive at positive knowledge of God's existence and nature—including discerning which attributes belong to God and how to conceptualize them. Call this the *guidance problem*. Solutions to it must address a related but more specific issue, the *ordering-attributes problem*; it asks which divine attributes, if any, are given priority in our understanding of the divine nature such that all other divine attributes are conceptualized, and perhaps even derived, through our understanding of the divine nature? Said otherwise, what rationale explains and justifies the specific ordering in our conceptualization of other divine attributes, such that some attributes are understood in light of others? Recent critiques have demonstrated the failures of *PBT* and truthmaker approaches to *DDS* to address these problems. In this first part I present a digest of the major difficulties these two problems pose for these two approaches to *CT*. These problems motivate the exigency of adopting an alternative form of *CT*, like Thomist *TVT*, which, despite requiring more contentious presumptions, can resolve these major difficulties.

6.1.1 Problems for Truthmaker Divine Simplicity

DDS is one of the more controversial commitments of *CT*. According to Aquinas, *DDS* is among the basic conclusions of the *triplex via*: that God is uncaused, uncomposed, and exceedingly perfect. Because God is simple, all attributes ascribed to God (e.g., goodness, omniscience, and omnipotence) are identical with God and each other—albeit without being synonymous concepts for us (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I.13.4).[1] Even though Aquinas's presentation of *DDS* has received significant attention from contemporary critics and defenders, two major obstacles have stood in the way of properly understanding and assessing Aquinas's *DDS* and his contributions to contemporary *CT*.

The first obstacle arose from saddling *DDS* with a Platonic conception of properties. During the revitalization of *CT* in the last century, attempts were made to rehabilitate *DDS* by availing the resources of Platonic theories of properties as *abstracta* instantiated or exemplified by concrete particulars. There are two fundamental difficulties with this *Platonic property defense of divine simplicity* (=PPDDS). First, *PPDDS* undermines divine aseity and simplicity by making God dependent on properties that God instantiates. Just as Plato and Socrates are good because they instantiate the property of goodness, so too God is good because God exemplifies the abstract property of goodness. Second, *PPDDS* entails some absurd and contradictory results, which Alvin Plantinga makes pellucid in his well-known critique of *PPDDS*. "[I]f God is identical with each of his properties, then since each of his properties is a property, he is a property—a self-exemplifying property. … If God is a property, then he isn't a person but a mere abstract object; he has no knowledge, awareness, power, love or life. So taken, the simplicity doctrine seems to be an utter mistake." (Plantinga 1980, 47).

Despite several ingenious efforts to salvage some version of *PPDDS*, many regard such objections to provide decisive reasons for rejecting *DDS*. This assessment is partially correct, for these objections do confute *PPDDS*, but more percipient exponents of *CT* have queried why Platonic theories of properties were ever paired with *DDS* in the first place. Michael Bergmann and Jeffery Brower have established that analytic philosophy approaches to *DDS* took a wrong turn from the outset by combining Platonic properties with *DDS*. Indeed, *DDS* is incompatible with any form of Platonic realism, and divine simplicity's "denial of Platonism seems to lead in the direction of a unified theory of predication, one that does *not* appeal to exemplifiables." (Bergmann and Brower 2006, 385; See also Brower 2008; Brower 2009).

In place of *PPDDS*, Brower and others propose *divine truthmaker simplicity* (=DTS), which articulates a unified theory of predication that rests on truthmakers, where truthmakers explain the truth of predications. The only "entities required for the truth of predications and for the referents of their corresponding abstract expressions are truthmakers." (Brower 2008, 23–24) *DTS* precludes understanding divine perfections as properties that God exemplifies, and so avoids the major difficulties Plantinga and others raised against *PPDDS*. Furthermore, *DTS* is certainly closer to the views of classical theists, like Augustine, Anselm, Avicenna, and Aquinas. *DTS* requires nothing more than:

> If an intrinsic essential predication of the form "God is *F*" is true, then (i) *God's F-ness* exists, (ii) *God's F-ness* is the truthmaker of 'God is *F*,' and (iii) *God's F-ness* is identical with God.
>
> (Beebe 2018, 474. See also Brower 2008, 17–24)

This means that if predications like "God is good" or "God is omnipotent" are true intrinsic predications of God, then *God's goodness* and *God's omnipotence* exist and are identical with God.

> The doctrine entails that God is identical with each of the *truthmakers* for the true (intrinsic) predications that can be made about him—indeed, that God himself is the truthmaker for each of these predications. But unlike the claim that God is a property, these claims seem perfectly coherent (at least on the assumption that truthmaker theory is itself coherent).
>
> (Brower 2008, 4)

Alex Pruss argues *DTS* also explains how a multitude of attributes can be truly predicated of God without entailing any complexity in God.

> If we understand divine simplicity as the claim that the minimal truthmaker of any claim solely about God and his parts is God himself, then it appears we can make coherent sense of the idea that divine attributes all collapse without endangering language. They collapse not in the language-endangering sense that one is *saying* the same thing by claiming that God is merciful as by claiming that God is just, but in the sense that the very same thing makes both claims true. Understanding how this works in practice almost surely requires a robust theory of analogical predication.
>
> (Pruss 2008, 166)

DTS doesn't offer a systematic answer to *CT*'s guidance problem, but it does rule out certain mistaken ways of conceptualizing the divine attributes and thereby provides some negative guidance. For example, one challenge facing *CT* is reconciling divine attributes that seem to be incompatible, like omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. Critics argue that maximal conceptions of omnipotence are either inconsistent in themselves (e.g., God cannot create a stone too large to lift) or incompatible with maximal conceptions of other attributes like omniscience and omnibenevolence. Many defenders of *CT* respond by conceding God cannot be omnipotent and ascribe "almightiness" or another scaled-down version of "omnipotence" to God that is consistent with divine simplicity and the other independently conceived omni-attributes. These responses maintain God is almighty or very knowledgeable, but God fails to instantiate the omni-attributes of omnipotence or omniscience.[2]

By contrast, *DTS* provides a straightforward explanation for why no *true* divine attributes can be incompossible. First, given its rejection of Platonic properties, the only truthmaker for any divine attribute is God. There cannot be any *true* divine or omni-attributes that God fails to be

the truthmaker for; God is the only truthmaker for true divine attributes. If omnipotence exists as a true divine attribute, then God possesses it. Second, given *DDS*, all true divine attributes must be compatible with each other for they are all identical to God. Our true conception of "omnipotence" must be compatible with *DDS* and God's other omni-attributes. This means that *DTS* rejects the common practice of conceptualizing omni-attributes independently of God and each other. The true conception of omnipotence cannot merely mean, say, "the ability to do anything that is not contradictory," but must be conceptualized attributively to mean, say, "God's ability to do anything that it is not contradictory for an absolutely simple God to do, given the true divine attributes of a simple God." Consequently, intuitions about conceivability, maximizing attributes, and logical possibility cannot provide the primary criteria for *true* omni-attributes. There might be any number of whimsical or fictitious conceptions of "omniscience" that are incompatible with equally ungrounded conceptions of "omnipotence" and "omnibenevolence," but none of them could be true conceptions of God's omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. One implication of *DTS* for the guidance problem is that all divine attributes must be conceptualized interdependently and derived from the divine nature of a simple God.

DTS excludes certain errors in our thinking about God, but it doesn't provide positive guidance for how to derive these interdependently conceptualized divine attributes. As Brower notes, positive guidance requires looking beyond *DTS*.

> Traditional theists standardly derive the intrinsic divine attributes (or better, the truth of predications involving them) from their understanding of the divine nature. That is to say, they take God to be not only good, powerful, wise, and just, but to be all these things in virtue of being divine.
>
> (Brower 2009, 117)

Recognizing that "traditional theists differ among themselves about how exactly the divine nature is to be conceived," Brower suggests a resolution to the *ordering-attributes problem* in his claim that Aquinas conceives the "divine nature in terms of aseity" which is established by the five ways.

> For theists of this sort, the predication [God is divine] will be shorthand for something like the claim that God is an absolutely independent being, and the derivation of particular divine attributes will be more indirect (e.g., Aquinas himself derives complete actuality from independence, and derives the other attributes from this, arguing that a being who is completely actual will

have all perfections, without limit, and hence be all good, power-
ful, wise, and just).

(Brower 2009, 126, n. 31)

While aseity is central to Aquinas's conception of the divine nature,
Brower's suggestion is imprecise insofar as it overlooks the *triplex via*'s
governing role in Aquinas's arguments for divine existence, aseity, sim-
plicity, and the derivation of other divine attributes. It is the *triplex via*,
not aseity on its own, that provides Aquinas's solution to the guidance
and ordering-attributes problems. In brief: Aquinas employs the *way of
causation* (*via causalitatis*) to establish God's existence and absolute
independence, and it is the *way of negation* (*via negationis*) that eluci-
dates why divine existence and aseity require divine simplicity since
God cannot be mixed up with the contingencies of composite creatures.
Finally, it's by the *way of super-eminence* (*via eminentiae*) that all
perfections—established and purified by causality and negation—are
ascribed to God. (Aquinas, *ST* I.13.8ad2)

Brower's account of *DTS* has faced objections concerning another
aspect of the ordering-attributes problem. Noël Saenz rightly contends
"No view of God should be unable to explain the pattern of dependency
exemplified between certain predications about God." He argues that
DTS is "unable to explain the pattern of dependency exemplified be-
tween certain predications about God." (Saenz 2014, 474) He also
charges that the patterns of dependency among predications of divine
attributes cannot be only conceptual; they require a real complexity in
God and this is incompatible with *DDS*.

Tim Pawl and James Beebe have cogently responded to Saenz's un-
sound and implausible arguments against *DTS*. (Pawl 2019; Beebe
2018). Beebe demonstrates that Saenz misunderstands traditional
DDS, which holds "whatever distinctions there are between divine
essential attributes are merely conceptual and concern the sense rather
than the reference of these terms. … [W]hatever priority or dependence
there is between predications regarding these attributes is also purely
conceptual rather than real." (Beebe 2018, 483) He also shows that
Saenz's arguments fail to justify why *DTS* needs more than conceptual
distinctions among divine attributes. I believe Pawl and Beebe vindicate
DTS's conceptual solution to the ordering-attributes problem, but they
do not suggest any guidance on how this conceptual solution functions.
In the second part I will argue the *triplex via* provides *CT* with answers
to this aspect of the ordering-attributes problem as well.

Divine truthmaker simplicity enables *CT* to sidestep the imbroglio
that came from wedding *DDS* with Platonic conceptions of properties.
DTS on its own provides little guidance for how to arrive at a con-
structive and truthful understanding of God's nature, aseity, simplicity,
and other attributes. Yet *DTS* was never introduced to solve the

guidance and ordering-attributes problems without drawing on other heuristics and resources of *CT*. Many *CT*s have looked to *PBT*'s heuristic to deliver such guidance. This brings us to the second obstacle standing in the way of understanding Aquinas's *DDS*, namely, that Thomistic *CT* has been insufficiently distinguished from Anselmian *PBT*.

6.1.2 Problems for Perfect Being Theology

PBT contends God is the most perfect being and that this can be established and conceptualized via the basic regulative principle of *PBT*, namely, Anselm's insight that God is the greatest possible being that than which nothing greater than can be conceived. (Leftow 2012, 9–10) The task of *PBT* is to employ intuitions, conceivability, possibility, maximalization, and consistency to formulate the roster of great-making properties (=*GMP*) ascribed to God. Anselmian *PBT* has dominated contemporary discussions to such an extent that it's widely assumed *PBT* provides the major rationale for *CT*'s commitment to *DDS*. If *CT* can show that simplicity is a *GMP*, then *PBT* delivers a straightforward way to establish that God is simple. So many contemporary defenders of *DDS* look to the regulative principle of *PBT* to motivate *DDS* and to get some bearing on how to conceptualize and defend what divine simplicity means, especially in connection with the other *GMPs* ascribed to the greatest possible being.

Jeff Speaks has leveled some fundamental criticisms of *PBT*'s Anselmian heuristic. (Speaks 2014; Speaks 2018). One major problem is whether *GMPs* are kind-relative. If kind-relative, then *GMPs* cannot come from non-deity kinds, for these are not relevant to God; *GMPs* must be those relative to the kind *deity*. But if *GMPs* are restricted to deity-kind properties, then we "seem to presuppose a knowledge of the divine nature that we might have wanted perfect being theology to provide rather than presuppose." (Speaks 2014, 258) If *GMPs* are not kind -relative, then we no longer have a way of determining which *GMPs* belong to God and which don't. The properties of blue mold might make Stilton, Roquefort, Danish Blue, and Gorgonzola great, but such properties aren't the great-making properties that make humans, let alone God, great. "[A]gain it looks like some classes of objects will yield the wrong results, whereas others (e.g., the choice of the singleton set containing God) will assume the sort of knowledge of God's properties that we want our method to deliver." (Speaks 2014, 258) Speaks concludes these problems "cast some doubt on the idea that perfect being theology is a recipe for discerning the divine attributes." (Speaks 2014, 266) Since *PBT* fails to deliver the very conception of the divine nature required for answering the guidance problem concerning which *GMPs* belong to God, *PBT* needs to

say something more specific about what God is like, something more than the bare claim that God is the best thing in some space of worlds. ... [I]n so doing, it will go beyond anything which could credibly be claimed to be a simple unpacking of the concept of God. Where should we get these assumptions? My suggestion has been that we return to the reason why questions about the nature and existence of God are of such fundamental importance.

<div align="right">(Speaks 2018, 167)</div>

Thus far I have summarized the case for why neither *DTS* nor *PBT* supplies the constructive understanding of the existence and nature of God required to answer the guidance and ordering-attributes problems. In the next part I will argue that Aquinas's *triplex via* provides *CT* with a heuristic that delivers on these desiderata.

6.2 Thomist *Triplex Via* Theology

6.2.1 The Triplex Via in Thomas Aquinas

Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and many other scholastics drew on pseudo-Dionysius's *On the Divine Names* to develop their own accounts of the *triplex via* or threefold way of understanding God. The *triplex via* provides *CT* with a principled heuristic for understanding God by way of causality, negation, and super-eminence that keeps philosophical theology from being either wholly negative and agnostic or too optimistic and falling into ontotheological idolatry. While there is a lively exegetical debate concerning Aquinas's ordering within this threefold way,[3] I shall designate this integrated ordering of causality, negation, and supereminence as Thomist *triplex via theology* (=*TVT*). I'll address the philosophical justification for this ordering later. Its primary exegetical justification is twofold. First, it's the order Aquinas gives in his explanation for how natural reason can know truths about God in *Summa theologiae* I.12.12.

> Our natural cognition takes its origin from the senses, and so our natural cognition can extend only as far as it can be led by sensible things. But from sensible things our intellect cannot reach the vision of God's essence, since sensible creatures are effects of God's that are not equal to the power of their cause. Therefore, on the basis of the cognition of sensible things we cannot know the whole power of God nor, as a result, see His essence. However, since His effects are dependent upon their cause, we can be led by those effects to know of Him whether He exists, and to know of Him what must belong to Him as the first cause of all things, exceeding all the things He causes.

> Hence, we know His relationship to creatures, viz., [1] that He is a cause of all of them; [2] and we know how creatures differ from Him, viz., that He is *not* any of the things that are caused by Him; [3] and we know that these things are denied of Him not because of any defect on His part, but rather because He exceeds the things He causes.
>
> (Aquinas, *ST* I.12.12; Freddoso mod. trans.;
> see also Aquinas, *De Pot.* 7.5ad2)

Second, the *triplex via* heuristic is constructively operationalized by Aquinas in the same order in the opening questions of the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* (=*ST*) and in the first book of his earlier *Summa contra gentiles* (=*SCG*). In his *Summae* Aquinas starts with God's existence known by causality (*ST* I.2; *SCG* I.13), then treats God's simplicity known by negation (*ST* I.3; *SCG* I.14-27), and then God's perfection known by super-eminence (*ST* I.4ff; *SCG* I.28ff). This integrated threefold heuristic establishes the existence, simplicity, and perfection of God, and this latter trio provides the basis for deriving the other divine attributes by Aquinas's recursive application of the *triplex via*. In this second part, I explain how the Thomistic *triplex via* provides a unified solution to the guidance and ordering-attributes problems of *CT*. I start with the guidance problem since its resolution frames an answer to the ordering-attributes problem.

Many contemporary exponents of *CT*, including *PBT*, all too often treat *DDS* and other divine attributes as independent topics to be investigated on their own and either give little consideration to systematic metaphysics or envision metaphysical neutrality as a theoretical virtue. The criticisms of Speaks however revealed that *PBT*'s minimalist strategy leaves it without the substantive assumptions required for resolving the guidance problem. This conclusion helps defuse the likely accusation that Thomist *TVT* requires too many presumptions. As we will see, the strength and contentiousness of Aquinas's *DDS* presupposes the *triplex via*, and his *TVT* presupposes the conclusions of a systematic ontology. Recognizing the dependence of theology on metaphysics corrects a common reading of Aquinas's *Summae*, which treats his philosophical theology as standing on its own independent from Aquinas's metaphysical positions. But this is a mistaken interpretation, for Aquinas follows Avicenna in maintaining that philosophical theology is the ultimate goal and conclusion of systematic metaphysical enquiry; philosophical theology without substantive metaphysical conclusions is empty.[4] We cannot understand Aquinas's use of the *triplex via* in his two *Summae* without appreciating the major metaphysical principles, arguments, and conclusions that are presupposed in his arguments for God's existence and essence. Thomist *CT* therefore presupposes more contentious commitments than is demanded by rival forms of *CT*. While this might seem

like a burden of Thomist *CT*, we must keep in mind the conclusion of Speaks' criticisms of *PBT* that the absence of substantive assumptions is what led to the vacuity of its way to God.

Before explaining why the *triplex via* presupposes major metaphysical commitments, I want to point out that *TVT* is a heuristic that could be appropriated by non-Thomistic classical theists. The view propounded here is unabashedly Thomist, but it can also be read as *illustrative* of how *TVT* provides *CT* with an alternative heuristic to *PBT*. Just as Anselmians don't have any proprietary claims on *PBT*, so also Thomists don't have any exclusive claims to the regulative principles of *TVT*. There were many historical versions of *triplex via* theology that weren't Thomistic, and contemporary *CTs* attracted to *TVT* could substitute Thomist metaphysical and theological theses for their own.

6.2.2 Triplex Via and the Guidance Problem

Let us first consider why the *triplex via* presumes substantive conclusions from metaphysics. Thomistic *CT* maintains that in this life God isn't experienced in ways accessible to pure philosophical inquiry, and since we don't directly know God's nature, we also don't experience or directly know the true omni-attributes that are equivalent to the divine attributes of the divine nature. This predicament raises the basic questions of the guidance problem for Thomistic *CT*. How can we know that God exists? And, since we don't experience entities in the world that have *omni-attributes*—only entities with *attributes*—how can we arrive at a true understanding of God's omni-attributes?

6.2.2.1 Via Causalitatis

As we saw from *ST* I.12.12, Aquinas maintains that we can achieve some limited knowledge of God through a philosophical investigation of the existing composite and contingent entities that are more known to us. Metaphysics, for Aquinas, establishes that the beings we encounter in the world are substances with attributes that are composed of act and potency, form and matter, existence (*esse*), and essence. He argues such diverse modes of ontological composition disclose distinct kinds of causal dependencies and contingencies; in short, composite beings are contingent and caused beings (See Aquinas, *ST* I.2-3; *De Pot.* 7.1). The extended ontological inquiries of metaphysics conclude with the basic aitiological question: Are there any first ultimate cause(s) or fundamental ground(s) for all the composite, contingent, and caused beings investigated within metaphysics?

It's at this point that Aquinas's metaphysics shifts from the investigations of ontology to those of philosophical theology, starting with the threefold way's *via causalitatis* and God's existence. In other

words, metaphysical inquiry into composite and caused beings leads to ultimate metaphysical questions concerning what causes caused beings. The *via causalitatis* contentiously concludes these ultimate causal investigations guide us to the existence of an uncaused first cause. Drawing on his metaphysical arguments that a composite being is a contingent being dependent on its causes, Aquinas argues in the five ways and elsewhere that it's impossible for an essentially ordered series of dependent beings to exist—that is, it's impossible for there to be an infinite *per se* ordered series of *caused causes* bestowing on their effects what they have ultimately never received *qua* caused—without the existence of a cause that is itself an absolutely independent and non-contingent first uncaused cause.[5] Aquinas identifies this uncaused cause with God.

6.2.2.2 Via Negationis

The first step in the *triplex via*'s solution to the guidance problem explains how the *via causalitatis* leads us to knowledge of God's existence based on metaphysical knowledge of composite and continent entities, which turn out to be the effects of God as their uncaused cause. Aquinas employs the *via causalitatis* to establish many of God's other attributes as well, but it's crucial to notice straight away that establishing God's *existence* as the uncaused cause by the *via causalitatis* directly delivers divine simplicity and initiates the *via negationis*. Indeed, the first affirmation of the *via causalitatis* is at once the first negation of the *via negationis*. For to demonstrate the existence of a first cause that is *un*caused is to affirm the existence of a cause that is *not like* any other causes and concerning which must be negated any resemblance to causes insofar as they are caused.

The next negations in line are those inextricably tied to "caused beings," namely, contingency and composition, and these denials inform Aquinas's understanding of God's simplicity and aseity. We can only affirm the truth that "God exists and is an *uncaused* cause" if God is *not* another composite and contingent being. For, as noted before, ontological composition is Aquinas's basic metaphysical criterion for being caused and contingent. God's simplicity is therefore to be understood and explicated in light of all the ways creatures are composed and God is *not*. Given Aquinas's ontology, this means at the very least that God *is not* corporeal but is incorporeal; *is not* composed of matter and form but is an immaterial and unlimited form; *is not* composed of act and potency but is pure actuality; *is neither* composed as a substance with attributes *nor* as an individual with its nature. Most fundamentally God *is not* composed of actual existence (*esse*) and essence but is subsisting existence in itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*) and thereby radically transcends all creatures which are contingent composites of *esse* and essence (see

Aquinas, *ST* I.3.1-8; *De Pot.* 7.1–11). This last negation (that God is not composed of *esse* and essence), which presupposes the causal affirmation (that God exists), is also the primary super-eminent affirmation (that God is pure act of existence in itself). These interconnected truths concerning God's being simple existence in itself disclose why the *triplex via* isn't comprised of three autonomous ways but is best understood as a single integrated *threefold way*. As a rough and ready rule, whenever we affirm some truth of God via causality, we are nearly always thereby also disclosing some divine attribute requiring both negation and super-eminent affirmation.

Aquinas's *via negationis* employs three types of negations (see *SCG* I.30).[6] "Absolute negations" concern attributes like corporeality and materiality which must be wholly denied of God insofar as they're inextricably bound up with modes of being incompatible with God's uncaused aseity and simplicity.

"*Res Significata* negations" recognize that some creaturely attributes exhibit real perfections that aren't inherently finite or contingent, like "truth," "goodness," "life," and "wisdom." "Truth" and "goodness" are examples of *transcendental perfections* that can be ascribed to *all being*s. "Life" and "wisdom" are *categorical perfections* that belong to distinct *kinds of beings*—living and intelligent beings. Both kinds of attributes or perfective modes of being can be distilled and truthfully ascribed to God insofar as we make the necessary conceptual modifications by negating any modes of composition or contingency from our understanding of the relevant divine attribute or thing signified (*res significata*).

"*Modus significandi* negations" scrutinize the inherent limitations of our human capacities for conceptualizing and predicating attributes of God. These negations purify our understanding of the true judgments we make about God from, for instance, our concrete or abstract modes of signification (e.g., "God is a free agent" or "God is goodness itself"), which we inescapably employ in thinking and talking about God. We can assent to these true statements, but the concrete and abstract modes of signification used to formulate such propositions cannot be attributed to God.

Striping away all these modes of ontological composition and conceptual limitation delivers Aquinas's negative understanding of the truth that "God is simple." We have seen that divine simplicity and aseity are necessitated first and foremost by the conclusion of the *via causalitatis* that an uncaused cause exists. Given Aquinas's metaphysical commitments, it follows from this conclusion, that God cannot be composed and so can be neither contingent nor dependent on any being. In short, the truths of divine aseity and simplicity elucidated by the *via negationis* fundamentally depend and follow upon the true

conclusion of the *via causalitatis*, "there exists an uncaused cause," which Aquinas calls God.

6.2.2.3 Via Eminentiae

The ways of causality and negation are indispensable to Aquinas's philosophical theology, but they only guide us to the truths that God exists and is utterly unlike creatures. This is where certain excessively apophatic interpretations of Aquinas go awry; they fail to situate the *via negationis* within Aquinas's *TVT*. Aquinas recognizes that causality and negation fail on their own to address the guidance problem of explaining why some names can be said of God and others cannot. For example, while God is the cause of both bodies and goods, "God is good" cannot simply mean "God is the cause of goods," for then we'd hold by parity that "God is a body" since he is the cause of bodies. But God isn't a body, since God is incorporeal (Aquinas, *ST* I.13.2). Enriching the conclusions obtained via causality and negation, the *via eminentiae* answers this difficulty by explaining how we can affirm true intrinsic and essential predications of God.[7] I start with Aquinas's distinctive approach to the *via eminentiae*'s affirmations that God is *ipsum esse subsistens* and perfection-in-itself who exceeds all other beings.

   Aquinas defends two peculiar metaphysical theses that underpin his conception of divine existence and perfection. First, all composite beings are constituted from an act of existence (*actus essendi*) and essence (*essentia*) which are two distinct first-order explanatory factors or principles. Second, that existence (*esse*) is the most fundamental *act* of all acts and the *perfection* of all perfections in each composite being.[8] These metaphysical commitments combined with the *triplex via* disclose what Aquinas calls this sublime truth (*haec sublimis veritatis*) that God is perfect existence in itself (Aquinas, *SCG* I. 22; *ST* I.13.11; Gilson 2002, ch.3). As we have seen, the *via causalitatis* affirms the truth that God exists, but this merely tells us that creatures exist and causally depend on what must exist as an independent uncaused first cause. Because Aquinas regards existence as a positive perfection, ascribing existence to God requires more than an extrinsic predication based on a causal affirmation.[9] Furthermore, unlike the contingent extrinsic predication of "being a cause," existence must be positively, intrinsically, and essentially affirmed of God, since God cannot fail to be essentially and intrinsically existing and be that which is uncaused, simple, and independent-in-itself. The positive meaning of existence ascribed to God must also be purified by the *via negationis*, which denies of God's actual existence any composition with essence, form, individuality, limitation, potency, accidents, and so forth. The *via eminentiae* presses our inquiries further still beyond these indispensable negations. Since we cannot affirm "God's existence" with a

meaning that is consistent with "God's nonexistence," there remains—according to Aquinas's metaphysical theology—a sense of the perfection of existence that survives the *via negationis*. Reaching beyond our creaturely conceptualization, the *via eminentiae* requires we judicatively affirm as true that there is a sense of existence that is positively ascribed to God and which cannot be wholly denied by negations; a sense of existence that transcends and exceeds the limits, compositions, contingencies, and imperfections of the actual existence of composite beings and our finite modes of conceptual understanding. While conceptually derived from the sense of *esse* ascribed to composite entities, the unique meaning of existence Aquinas attributes to God is neither equivocal (since that is ruled out by the *via causalitatis*) nor univocal (which is excluded by the *via negationis*). The *via eminentiae* reconciles the truths of causation and negation by elaborating and justifying a true affirmation of divine existence which must be understood similarly-dissimilarly, that is, analogically.[10] In short, the *triplex via* necessitates an analogical understanding of divine predications that amplifies and complements Pruss's point concerning the indispensability of analogy for divine truthmaker simplicity.

Finally, given Aquinas's metaphysical identification of actual existence with perfection, the affirmation that God is subsisting existence-in-itself thereby entails God is perfection-in-itself. Since all perfections for Aquinas are measured according to the completeness of their actuality, and God is pure unlimited actuality of existence not lacking or incomplete in any way, God is unlimited pure perfection (Aquinas, *De Pot.* 7.2ad9; Owens 1985, ch. 3). While this identification of divine perfection with the divine nature as pure simple existence is fundamental for Aquinas's derivation of other omni-attributes, this initial super-eminent affirmation of divine perfection does little to amplify our positive knowledge of God's perfection. It affirms God is perfection-in-itself because God is existence-in-itself. What is still required is Aquinas's less proprietary and more basic approach to the *via eminentiae* and the guidance it provides for understanding God's *omni-perfection* (Wippel 2000, 573–574).

The *via eminentiae*'s basic explanatory contribution to the *triplex via* is to guide and elaborate our positive understanding of God's omni-perfection. The positive content of our analogical understanding of God's omni-perfection is derived from *triplex via* theology's recursive ruminations on what *divine perfection* must be for God to be the cause of the manifold effects or created perfections that populate creation (Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, I, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3; *ST* I.4.2). To this end, the *via eminentiae* presumes two substantive metaphysical theses. First is that the positive attributes of entities are modes of perfection. Second is that causal agents must either exhibit or be sufficiently powerful to cause the perfections that exist in their effects.[11] On this

basis Aquinas can argue that even though God is *not like* caused and composite beings, nevertheless all such beings are *like* God insofar as they exhibit modes of being or perfection that finitely and imperfectly resemble their ultimate cause. In order for God to be the first uncaused cause of the multitude of effects exhibited by creatures, God must in some more preeminent and analogical way *be* what God creates— including what God is able to create but does not (Aquinas, *ST* I.4.3; 15.1-3; *SCG* I.28-29). In a metaphysics like Aquinas's, where all positive attributes of creatures are created perfections that resemble or imitate the divine perfection, the ground for these created perfections must pre-exist in God in a simple and super-eminent way as God's divine omni-perfection which isn't lacking any perfection of being. So the connection between created attributes and God's omni-perfection is rooted in the identification of all *positive created attributes* with *caused* or *dependent perfections* that are caused by and imitate the divine first uncaused cause that is omni-perfection-in-itself.

The *via eminentiae* branch of the *triplex via* leads us to two kinds of conclusions about God. It establishes that God is perfection-in-itself, and it amplifies our understanding of God's omni-perfection by providing a path for establishing and conceptualizing all other divine attributes understood as divine perfections. But it doesn't do this apart from causation and negation; all further attributes ascribed to God must be reconciled with the *triplex via's* fundamental conclusions that God is perfect, simple, existence-in-itself. The *triplex via* is an integrated unity of ways that together guide the conceptual modifications of creaturely perfections required to truthfully ascribe any perfection to God, starting with the most fundamental perfection of existence. We have seen that *TVT* takes a different route to the guidance problem from that of *PBT*. Rather than assuming a conception of God at the outset, the *triplex via* guides and establishes an analogical understanding of God that is rooted in the ways all of God's creatures are caused, composite, and imperfect reflections of their Creator. While much more needs to be said by way of defense and explanation, this cursory tour should be sufficient to illustrate how Aquinas employs the *triplex via* to answer the guidance problem and deliver philosophical conclusions concerning God's existence and a basic understanding of the divine nature. In the last section I will conclude with some points about how Aquinas's *triplex via* speaks to the ordering-attributes problem as well.

6.2.3 Triplex via Theology and the Ordering-Attributes Problem

Given the variety of created perfections to choose from among the effects of God, critics might query why Thomist *TVT* gives pride of place to existence, simplicity, and perfection in its analogical understanding of the divine

nature. This brings us to the *ordering-attributes problem*, which raises two difficulties for Thomist *TVT*. First, why should these divine attributes be prioritized and fundamental in our basic understanding of God? Second, what explains the order among the many other divine perfections we ascribe to God's nature? Why must we conceptualize, for instance, God's will and omnipotence in light of God's goodness, and not vice-versa?

Unlike *PBT*, *TVT* provides a straightforward answer to the first of these two difficulties, for the very integrated way by which the *triplex via* establishes God's existence, simplicity, and perfection also explains why they must be prioritized. For starters, since the *triplex via* commences with metaphysical conclusions and not theological assumptions, it's through an inquiry concerning ultimate causes or grounds that we first hit upon the existence of God. Furthermore, among divine attributes, we must begin with divine existence for the probative justification that we can say nothing true about the divine nature as simple, perfect, omnipotent, omniscient, and so forth, if we don't first know God exists. God can only be a truthmaker for all true intrinsic predications about God if God *exists* as the truthmaker for all true intrinsic predications. Clearly then, divine existence must be the first attribute affirmed of God, for it is presupposed by all the other divine attributes. Next, since our knowledge of God's existence depends on the causal conclusion that God is an uncaused cause, we can only maintain God is *un*caused by negating every composition or contingency that would undermine this conclusion. This is why divine simplicity and aseity follow immediately from any cogent contingency and causal proofs for God's existence. Third, divine perfection follows from God's simple existence, because all true perfective attributes of creatures are modes of existence caused by God; and since God is pure, simple, existence, not lacking in any perfection, God must be pure perfection and the creative source of all created perfections. Given this primacy of existence, simplicity, and perfection delivered by the *TVT*'s understanding of the divine nature, all other attributes ascribed to God by the *triplex via* must be conceptualized in light of God's perfect simple existence. What these rough arguments aim to show is that while divine existence, simplicity, and perfection cannot be derived from omnipotence, omnibenevolence, or any other omni-attributes, these core attributes also illuminate the way the divine nature is the truthmaker for the true understanding and ascription of these other omni-perfections to God. The true meaning of omnibenevolence or omnipotence must be informed by and conceptualized via the *triplex via* in light of a true and prior understanding of the divine nature as simple perfect existence-in-itself. This brings us to the second difficulty raised by the ordering-attributes problem.

The *triplex via* also supplies principles for establishing an order among the other divine attributes. The first distinction we must observe here isn't unique to *TVT* but does follow immediately from it, namely, the basic contrast between intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of God.

The former are attributes that are intrinsically and essentially true of God (e.g., "God is good"), whereas extrinsic and contingent attributes (e.g., "God is a creator") are ascribed to creatures in virtue of their dependency on or causal relationship to God. All extrinsic and contingent attributes must be conceptualized in light of the intrinsic and essential attributes of God, which are also the grounds for the existence and truth of any extrinsic attributes.[12]

The more difficult ordering-attributes problem concerns the explanatory priority among intrinsic attributes. Here too the *triplex via* provides an answer which I can only sketch here. As we have seen, a host of ontological conclusions are presupposed by the inquiries of Thomist philosophical theology. Among these conclusions is a surview of the diverse modes of finite being which the *triplex via* employs as a surview of the variety of ways the finite perfections of beings are limited imitations of their ultimate causal source and ground in God who is perfection-in-itself. This metaphysical hierarchy of finite perfections provides an ordering principle for deriving and conceptualizing God's other divine perfections. How so?

We've already seen from the *via negationis* that our concepts of some creaturely perfections require more radical negating forms of conceptual modification than others to work out accurate conceptions of divine perfections—all of which must be purified of the contingency and finitude of created beings. This insight provides the basic principle for how to establish, order, and conceptualize the other divine perfections. The perfections of finite beings that are least limited in themselves take conceptual priority in our understanding of God's omni-perfection since that which is least intrinsically limited and imperfect in its finite mode of being most resembles God's unlimited perfection. The ordering among our conceptions of divine perfections must therefore aim to conceptually prioritize those perfections that resemble most the divine perfection, which will deliver a philosophical theology that more closely resembles God. Again, as Beebe and Pawl argue in response to Saenz, despite the prioritization of divine existence, simplicity, and perfection in our understanding of all other divine attributes, these conceptual distinctions and priorities don't require any real distinction within God among these divine attributes. These are simply the conceptual distinctions and patterns of conceptual priority and subordination required to conform our minds to what the *triplex via* reveals to be the inherent explanatory order for a true philosophical understanding of God.

Aquinas's metaphysics establishes a relatively straightforward hierarchy from less limited perfections to more limited perfections. The first major contrast is between the transcendentals and the categories. Categorical perfections of being like substance, quantity, quality, relation, and so forth are more limited generic modes of being than the analogical transcendental perfections of being like thing, one, another,

truth, goodness, and beauty, which are each ascribed to all categorical perfections of being (Aquinas, *On Truth*, q. 1, a. 1; 21.1). Hence, we must understand God's unity, truth, and goodness, prior to conceptualizing—through the *triplex via*—the ways diverse categorical perfections can be truthfully and intrinsically predicated of God. Similarly, among categorical perfections, substantial perfections take explanatory priority to the more limited modes of being belonging to attributes or accidents (e.g., qualities, powers, relations, etc.), which are modifications of substances. We identify God's power with God's subsistence thereby negating "accident" from our conception of divine omnipotence, rather than attempting to conceptualize divine subsistence as if it could be an aspect of some "accident" of God called divine power.[13] Furthermore, among and within the categories of accidents there are conceptual and explanatory priorities pertaining to some accidents over others, like when some accidents are limiting modifications of more basic attributes. For instance, the power of intellect is prior to the virtue of wisdom, which is a modification of the power of intellect, just as love and justice are modifications of the power of will. There are also more complicated patterns of reciprocity, as with the creaturely powers of intellect and will, which are not negated in our understanding of divine intellect and will. For Aquinas, intellect and will are inextricably confluent and co-operating powers, where the intellect specifies what the will elects to exercise or not (Aquinas, *On Evil*, q. 6). The ascription of intellect and will to God requires negating the limitations, compositions, and contingencies of created intellect and will, but we must nevertheless understand the divine will as specified by God's perfect intellectual knowledge of all truth and goodness, and the liberty of the divine will cannot be necessitated to will from eternity any limited, participated, composite, or caused good.

A great deal more is needed here to defend this sketch of how Thomist *TVT* answers the ordering-attributes problem and to spell out in more detail the proper order among these attributes and their significance in light of their mutual compatibility and coherence with divine existence, simplicity, and perfection. I hope what I have outlined provides us with sufficient resources to address a few final worries or points of clarification regarding Thomist *TVT*.

First, *TVT* needs to be distinguished from views that purport to derive all the divine attributes simply on the basis of establishing some primary attribute of God, like existence-in-itself, infinity-in-itself, or perfection-in-itself. Hence, Thomist *TVT* rejects any presentations of Aquinas which suggest all of God's attributes can be derived from the thesis that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*. The recursive application of the *triplex via* requires we continually return to the perfections of the caused and composite creatures more known to us, and ascend from

there via causality, negation, and super-eminence to conceptually generate and understand how and why some perfection is ascribed analogically to God and how it coheres with God's being perfect simple existence-in-itself.

Second, appreciating Aquinas's *TVT* reveals what is neglected in any mistaken purely apophatic or negative construal of Thomist philosophical theology. They simply overlook the nested role of the *via negationis* within Aquinas's *TVT* buttressed as it is by the affirmations of the *via causalitatis* and the *via eminentiae*. The integrated order of the *triplex via* is aimed to steer clear of the Scylla of ontotheology and the Charybdis of radical agnosticism about God's nature. Our negative knowledge of God is balanced between two positive forms of knowledge, which are themselves tempered and disciplined by the mediation of negative knowledge. Nevertheless, despite any humble advances in philosophical knowledge of God, the divine nature in itself remains a mystery to us. Our understanding *in statu viae* is, as Bernard Lonergan adroitly elaborates, "imperfect, analogical, obscure, gradually developing, synthetic, and [yet] highly fruitful." (Lonergan 2007, 19) Indeed, even though we can only achieve limited knowledge of the finite order of created perfections because God's omni-perfection is unlimited and infinite, there is no end to the array of true divine attributes. Aquinas provides a nice gloss on this point as it pertains to the plurality of attributes required for us to even begin to understand what God is.

> The plurality of [divine] names comes from the fact that God Himself exceeds our intellect. That God exceeds our intellect is on the part of God Himself due to the plenitude of His perfection, and it is on the part of our intellect due to its deficiency to comprehend Him. Hence, it is clear that the plurality of these meanings (*rationum*) is not only due to our intellect but also due to God Himself, insofar as His perfection surpasses every conception of our intellect. And therefore the plurality of these meanings (*rationum*) reflect something in the reality which God is; not a plurality of realities, but the plenitude of perfection, from which it renders that all of these conceptions are adapted to Him.
> (Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, I, d.2, q.1, a.3, my trans.)

6.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have argued that Aquinas's *triplex via* theology provides classical theism with a fruitful heuristic for philosophical inquiries concerning God's existence and essence. I explained why the important insights of Thomist divine truthmaker simplicity remain incomplete if they are not situated within Aquinas's *triplex via* heuristic, which both establishes and elaborates the doctrine of divine simplicity via the ways

of causality, negation, and super-eminence. Most significantly, I have shown that Aquinas's *triplex via* theology provides illuminating answers to the guidance and ordering-attributes problems where other more well-known forms of classical theism—like perfect being theology—have failed to resolve these basic challenges to classical theism.

Notes

1 I shall use the following standard abbreviations for the works of Thomas Aquinas: Aquinas (1962) *Summa theologiae* (= *ST*); Aquinas (1952) *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* (= *De Pot.*); Aquinas (1952–1954) [*Disputed Questions*] *On Truth* (= *On Truth*); Aquinas (1929–1947) *Scriptum super libros sententiarum* (= *Commentary on the Sentences*); Aquinas (2003) *On Evil* (= *On Evil*); Aquinas (1975) *Summa Contra Gentiles* (= *SCG*); Aquinas (1986) [*Commentary on Boethius's On the Trinity*] *Questions V-VI. The Division and Methods of the Sciences* (= *In De Trin.*).

2 For a survey of these debates, see Nagasawa 2017.

3 For exegetical debates, see Rocca 2004, 49-74; te Velde 2006, 72-90; O'Rourke 1992; O'Rourke 2016; Ewbank 1990.

4 See Aquinas, *In de Trin.*, V.4; White 2009; De Haan 2013.

5 For an explanation of why Aquinas holds an essentially ordered causal series that "is asymmetric, irreflexive, and wholly derivative," cannot have an infinite regress, see Cohoe 2013.

6 I've appropriated Rocca's insightful typology but altered his terminology. See Rocca 2004, 58-62.

7 For example, if "God is infinite" means God is neither finite nor limited, then it is a mere negation that follows from *DDS*. If it means God is pure limitless formal perfection, then it requires the *via eminentiae* argumentation. Similarly, if divine eternity is a negation of temporality implied by immutability (if no change from prior to posterior, then no duration from past to present to future). But if divine eternity means the perfect simultaneous unending life, then it requires *via eminentiae*. See Aquinas, *ST* I.10.1-4.

8 Aquinas, *SCG* II. 52-54; Nevitt 2018, 321–352; Gilson 2002, chs. 3-4.

9 Aquinas holds we can affirm true intrinsic and essential predications about God, but we cannot attain any proper conceptual understanding of God's perfections-in-themselves, only an incomplete, analogical understanding based on cogent inferences and true judgments. This is because the *via causalitatis* establishes the truth of God's existence by affirming relations of dependency that only belong intrinsically to creatures. For instance, creatures are intrinsically composite so are contingent and causally dependent ultimately on that which exists as uncaused, not contingent, and not composite. "Being a cause" is only affirmed extrinsically of God, for if God were essentially and intrinsically a cause of composite beings, then God's essence would depend on them. This would render God contingent, contrary to the *via causalitatis*'s conclusion, *DDS*, and divine aseity.

10 This might seem like hand-waving, but it's directed to a theory of analogy which I cannot detail here. Briefly: first, the meaning of existence ascribed to God is radically unlike the already analogical understanding of existence (*esse*), essence, and common being (*ens commune*) that Aquinas ascribes to all composite beings. Prior to any question of God, being is thoroughly analogical for Aquinas. Second, the meaning of actual existence affirmed of

God by the *via causalitatis* must be *similar* to the meaning of existence that is positively, intrinsically, and analogically affirmed of actually existing composite beings—like the basic perfection of actually existing. Third, the *via negationis* discloses that the meaning of existence ascribed to God must be radically *dissimilar* to the meaning of existence ascribed to beings studied by ontology insofar as these beings are composite, contingent, caused beings. Fourth, the *via eminentiae* fuses this similarity among dissimilarities and points to an analogical meaning of existence as omni-actuality and omni-perfection beyond any found in composite beings which we must affirm as truly ascribed intrinsically to God. In short, our analogically or proportionally unified understanding of the actual existence of composite beings must be expanded and conceptually transformed through the *triplex via* heuristic in order to arrive at an indirect, radically limited, and analogical understanding of the true affirmation that God is pure act of existence-in-itself. See Hochschild 2010.

11 To be clear, this principle of causality doesn't require that God or humans be fiery in order to make a fire; rather, they must exhibit perfections sufficient for causing such perfective attributes to exist. See De Haan, Forthcoming; Kretzman, 1997, 140-157; Wippel 2000, 572-575; Wippel 2007.

12 While I can't address here the proper order among extrinsic attributes, priority should be given to those extrinsic attributes that are ontologically and explanatorily the most fundamental and universal. God being the providential Creator over all creatures will therefore take priority over any extrinsic attributes pertaining to some subset of creatures, like divine predestination of intellectual creatures.

13 Aquinas also prioritizes the divine names belonging to the divine substance over the principles of divine operation; see Aquinas, *ST* I.2.prol.; I.14.prol.

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7 The Unity of the Divine Nature: Four Theories

Timothy O'Connor

The doctrine of divine simplicity has roots in classical Greek philosophical thought.

It is affirmed by nearly all late classical and medieval Jewish, Muslim, and Christian theologians.

Nowadays it is much more controversial. Some philosophical theologians contend that divine simplicity is foundational to a proper understanding of the nature of God, a central plank in anything that may lay claim to the label of "classical theism." Others dismiss it as unintelligible and take its enduring interest to reside chiefly in providing a disquieting lesson about how talented thinkers can drive themselves into ditches.

"Divine simplicity" theses are taken by their adherents to follow from divine aseity, the thesis that God exists in complete ontological independence of anything else, and this implication is their primary motivation.[1] How exactly we should understand the aseity thesis is itself controversial. Some define it such that their preferred, maximally demanding notion of divine simplicity follows immediately. But doing so forestalls proper debate about what understanding best fits God's perfection or maximal excellence. For now, we may note that it is universally understood to require that God's nature does not encompass separable components or elements of any kind, since if that were so, *they* would be more fundamental than God. Furthermore, their union in the divine nature would require an explanation that necessarily would advert to something external to God. Hence, far from existing *a se*, God would be dependent both from within and without. But that "the buck stops with God" is fundamental to the idea of God. So. we should infer that God's nature is indissoluble. He is an ontological unity.

The "doctrine of divine simplicity" is commonly used as a label for a particular (and maximally radical) theory of the indicated divine unity that has commanded wide assent through the outsized influence of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. But it is also sometimes used in the post-medieval Protestant theological tradition simply to assert the needed ontological unity of God, such that one might entertain a *range*

of theories of simplicity. (Right after Aquinas, John Duns Scotus advanced a distinct account of divine unity that he took to be an explication of divine simplicity.) On this broader usage, the thesis that God is ontologically simple is uncontroversial; controversy arises concerning its proper theoretical development. Some readers will find this usage odd and distracting. Accordingly, I will alternately label the Augustinian-Thomistic account as "the theory of absolute simplicity" or "strict identity theory" (and eventually simply "identity theory"), and label the genus to which it and its rivals belong as "theories of divine unity," and leave it to the reader to decide whether one or more of the rivals may also be seen as non-absolute versions of divine simplicity.

The past few decades have seen real progress in understanding what is at stake in the substantive debate and the different ways we might explicate and defend puzzling ideas.[2] However, discussion has been hampered by the failure to regiment and systematically address relevant issues and options. God may lack separable components, but not so for theories of his unity. In what follows, I show how four theoretical "packages," ordered by theoretical stringency, naturally emerge. I then press largely familiar reasons for favoring the least stringent package while engaging recent defenses of more stringent varieties. Finally, I consider potential explanatory disadvantages to embracing the minimalist account and argue that they are not significant.

7.1 Strict Identity of Attributes With God (Absolute Simplicity)

Within the Christian tradition, the most prominent elaborations and defenses of absolute divine simplicity were made by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, whom I take to affirm the same essential theory. It is constituted by a core claim, which I group here with two of its important implications to facilitate comparison with alternative unity accounts:[3]

1A God's attributes (e.g., perfect power and perfect knowledge) and His existence are not distinct in *any* ontologically-grounded sense: they are all strictly, numerically identical.
2A God has no contingent intrinsic features.
3A God is never acted upon.

As is well known, this "strict identity" theory faces severe theoretical problems. I will present them in the form of questions for which a negative answer is at minimum a serious point against any theory of divine unity, and I will consider the best attempts by identity theorists on offer to answer them affirmatively. Counterintuitive and difficult to explicate commitments are often spoken of as "costs" of a metaphysical theory, while also occasioning a thrill at the daunting challenge of showing their

inner coherence, especially when they test the limits of our thought. To borrow a commercial airline metaphor, to theorize within the strictures of absolute simplicity is to fly First Class.

7.1.1 Does It Offer an Account of Divine Attributes on Which They Are Comprehensible?

The claim that God's perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness are strictly identical, and identical to God himself, is universally seen as perplexing. In our understanding, power, knowledge, and goodness are distinct features that figure in distinct explanations of phenomena. In creatures, they vary independently not only in intensity (some relatively powerful human beings are markedly ignorant) but also in instantiation (some powerful entities lack knowledge altogether). Further, such attributes seem necessarily only to *characterize* things, rather than being free-standing acting entities.

The standard reply of identity theorists is twofold: First, God's perfect attributes are distinct in kind from creaturely attributes falling under the same terms, and so we cannot assume that these "structural" facts concerning creaturely attributes carry over to the divine case. Second, our tendency to think that they *must* carry over reflects only an inescapable fact about human cognition: not how things must be, with respect to God, but how we must think them to be, with respect to God and anything else. To understand something's behavior, *we* must model it as having components (in a general sense) that interact or are differentially responsible for various aspects of its effects. In the case of "anything else," this ineluctable form of cognition is well-suited to capture the reality of what we cognize. For creaturely phenomena, the complexity of behavior or of the output always tracks some measure of complexity in the source, and basic predicates with fundamentally different meanings mark really distinct features of such things. But God of course is a special, indeed radically singular case, and in Him there are no "moving parts" for our minds to latch onto. His power and knowledge are a "higher" reality of which complex and distinct creaturely power and knowledge are pale imitations and from which they spring. We *mean* different truths in calling God powerful and knowledgeable, but they refer in this unique case to a single reality, which is none other than the radically simple God himself.

Some identity theorists suggest (by, e.g., Stump and Kretzmann 1985, 356-7) that this is analogous to unwittingly co-referring expressions such as 'the morning star' and 'the evening star,' which, as it turned out, both refer to (the planet) Venus. But the distinction in sense among co-referring expressions seems to be made possible by real complexity either of the referents or of phenomena involving them. The distinct terms are applied to distinct phases or states of the object in question

(brightness, location, and trajectory in relation to the observable sky at the respective periods of the observer's day). Even for an imagined case involving an intrinsically unchanging, physical mereological simple, distinctions in sense would reflect distinct and irreducible relational facts (either facts of occupation of spatiotemporal points/regions or facts of relative distance, together with causal-relational facts with the observer). But the Thomist attribute-identity thesis conjoined with God's non-spatiality cannot account in a similar fashion for distinct predications of God.

If distinctions among the ways we characterize God reflect only something about us (a very general feature of the way our minds grasp truth) and have no real basis in God, why is it appropriate to use such different terms? How can there be diverse truths concerning the in-trinsic nature of God? Many will reach here for Aquinas's doctrine of analogy (ST 1a 13). Aquinas's discussion of this is somewhat complex, and it has occasioned a voluminous secondary literature. I will sketch its bare outline, just enough to be in position to observe the limits of the answer it allows for the question just posed. Aquinas contends that while 'power,' e.g., does not univocally apply to God and creatures, these uses are systematically related in such a way that it is apt to use the same term in both cases; they are not merely equivocal. We first use 'power' in application to creatures, in whom power is necessarily limited in certain ways (e.g., creaturely powers necessarily operate on pre-existing stuff, are finite, and are diminished upon exercise). Even so, all such limited creaturely power bears a certain 'likeness"' to God, its pre-existing and unlimited source. God also has effects, though in a radically different and "higher" manner. The same is true for 'knowledge,' 'goodness,' and other attributions that are literally true of God. Now, if this were all that needed to be said, the path to holding that our usage in reference to God and creatures is univocal would seem clear: even if Aquinas is correct that limitation is em-bedded in the ordinary meaning of these terms owing to their origin in creaturely application, we could form more general concepts that carry no implication of limitation in manifestation, and so are wholly and univocally applicable to God.[4] But there is a deeper difficulty, which is that, for us, *any* concept of power that we can form will necessarily make it out to be distinct from knowledge. Creatures bear a limited likeness to God's power and a limited likeness to God's knowledge and these likenesses are distinct, even though (according to Aquinas's ab-solute simplicity doctrine) God's power and knowledge are identical. This radical identity thesis may entail Aquinas's denial of univocity in literal predications common to humans and God. But it does not help to answer the above question of how it is fitting that we should apply to God terms expressing widely differing concepts when these can reflect distinctions in our thought only, with no real basis in God.

Instead, it merely transposes the question's terms: how can it be that there are intrinsically very different ways of bearing analogical likeness to an entity devoid of complexity?[5]

Identity theorists say that while God is utterly simple, his nature is unsurpassably abundant or "rich," such that no one way of bearing limited likeness to it could do so exhaustively or definitively (e.g., Panchuk 2019, passim). But what does "rich" signify? We speak of rich people, rich sauces, and rich discussions. In these cases, quantity and/or structural complexity are very close to the surface of our meaning. It appears that, in application to God's nature, "rich," too, functions only as a kind of irreducible analogy! Panchuk (2019) suggests that we can make some headway by seeing the identity thesis through the lens of God's infinitude. A line that is infinitely long "encompasses and surpasses" lines of particular finite length. Analogously, God's infinite and uncreated being, being infinite *simpliciter*, "lacks any particular qualities while encompassing all of them." (8) The analogy is apt enough for thinking about the relation of one limitless divine attribute (power, say) to corresponding finite counterparts. But it is no help for making sense of the identity theorist's denial of distinction *among* attributes, whereby God's simple nature is supposed to transcend the distinction among attributes even when conceived as infinite, 'encompassing" all of them while devoid of any form of complexity.

In the end, the identity theorist should (and typically does) say that God's absolute simplicity renders God wholly incomprehensible to us. That admission results in an impasse with the doctrine's critics, as its proponents do not concede it as a point against the doctrine. They reason that it should be entirely unsurprising that the transcendent, unlimited, and uncaused source of being is fully beyond the ken of a creature whose cognitive capacities are fitted for theorizing about empirical phenomena. Put differently, it is theoretically plausible that our best theory of the nature of God will have to concern itself with the limits of our own cognition as much as it characterizes its principal object, justifying thereby its own sharp boundedness.

I will return in the final section to the question of whether the incomprehensibility of the identity doctrine should be taken as a strike against it. Much recent discussion has focused instead on arguments that the doctrine is inconsistent with other theses that most of its proponents accept or (according to critics) should accept. I will now briefly summarize the current status of these arguments.

7.1.2 Is It Consistent with God's Willing and Knowing a Contingent Creation?

Most theists assume that God's willing the actual created order into being is contingent. He might have willed another order or none at all.

Aquinas tells us that God necessarily wills his own goodness, which is none other than Himself (ST Ia.19.2). This is his primary willing to which any other willing is ordered. He is also aware of the value of any number of possible creations as distinct ways of showing forth his glory. He contingently wills our world as one valuable manifestation of his goodness; He might have willed another world as a distinctly valuable manifestation of his goodness; and (according to many, at least) He might have simply willed his goodness without accompanying manifestation. God's willing his own goodness, common to all such scenarios, *is* intrinsic to the divine nature, as is his awareness of the value that each possible scenario would realize, including the one in which He does not create. (On the possibility of the latter scenario, see Pruss 2016 and, in reply, O'Connor 2022.) Of course, the possibility of willing a contingent creation is one thing, actually willing it is another. How might God's willing of contingent actuality be "contained" or "grounded" in his willing of his own perfect goodness?

God knows created reality, Aquinas further tells us, by knowing Himself (ST Ia 14, 5–6). A natural way to understand that claim begins with the fact that the very possibility of everything apart from God resides in the power of God. God knows all possibilities, including the possibility of the actual world, by knowing his own power—which, on Aquinas's account, is identical to God. Of course, grasping the possibility of a world in its every detail is one thing, knowing that it actually exists is another. How might the knowledge of contingent actuality be entailed by a knowledge of God's simple, necessary nature?

Contemporary proponents of the strict identity theory answer these two questions by offloading the determination of contingent content in divine willing and knowledge onto the world. The suggestion is that God's knowing (willing) a world's actuality varies from world to world in virtue of the worldly variation itself (Pruss 2008, 163-5; Brower 2009, §3.2, and especially Grant 2012, 257-74, which offers three externalist models). God's knowing (willing) *Himself* is intrinsic to his nature. God's knowing (willing) our contingent reality, C, consists in that invariant self-knowledge (self-willing) together with C's absolutely dependent existence. Where there is no contingent being, God's willing and knowing reduces to his willing and knowing of Himself.[6]

However, such a radical content externalism is implausible. Focus on divine knowledge. Knowing contingent reality seems to require an equally contingent, intrinsically contentful state, a state that "registers" that reality. (It initially sounds quite plausible that knowing a reality may be grounded in purposively *creating* it.[7] But we must be careful not to illicitly draw on a naive, pre-theoretical way of thinking about the cognitive character of purposive creation that the simplicity theorist rejects.) Externalism about divine cognition may try to draw support from the general thesis of semantic externalism for *human* knowers. In this thesis, what we are thinking about is partly determined by the nature of

the things themselves, owing to the causal character of reference. But notice that a central element of the semantic externalist picture is the causal role of the object of knowledge in determining the intrinsic character of the knowing state. I know there is water in front of me (and not a distinct possible substance that manifests itself to us in phenomenally similar ways) because water plays a distal causal role in fixing our shared concept *water,* and the sample of water in front of me is a central cause of my present experience of (and consequent belief state concerning) it. By eschewing any such causal relations flowing *from creatures* to God, the identity theorist cannot plausibly draw an analogy from semantic externalism regarding human thought and knowledge to the more radical kind of externalism she envisions concerning God's knowledge of contingent truth.

The thesis that the contingent component of God's willing and knowing is wholly extrinsically determined by the world is not theoretically attractive. It "hollows out" the intrinsic character of these states in a way that is deeply counterintuitive while remaining at present a purely formal proposal, lacking—seemingly necessarily—the developed machinery of its human semantic externalist counterpart that softens resistance to its similarly surprising claim.[8]

A second difficulty follows from the assumption that our world not only is contingent but also unfolds non-deterministically. In that case, God's knowledge of and willed response to undetermined creaturely choices will be explanatorily posterior to them, which appears to undercut the sufficiency of radically externalist accounts of both divine willing and divine knowledge of his creation. (Molinism offers a way to deny the implication of explanatory posteriority, but the severe difficulties besetting that doctrine—not least its doubtful consistency with divine aseity— would only add to the cost of affirming absolute simplicity.)

One clean way around this problem is to deny its starting premise of contingency in creation, something Katherin Rogers (2020) explores in developing a "neoplatonist" construal of absolute simplicity on which God necessarily wills the best possible creation. But necessitarianism about creation has a number of unattractive aspects. Rogers argues with some plausibility that it would not undermine *divine* freedom (since it would remain true that God would not be necessitated *from without*). But even if this latter claim is accepted, the necessitarian proposal plausibly entails that humans lack moral responsibility (which has major repercussions in Christian theology) and that God is *wholly* responsible for our world's worst moral evils.[9]

7.1.3 Is It Consistent with God's Knowledge of Complexity?

Contingent and necessary truths—even those truths that are plausible candidates for being "basic," jointly providing sufficient grounds for the

rest—are many and varied. Could an absolutely simple mind grasp this complex body of information? We might well initially suppose that in grasping his own power, God grasps all creational possibilities. But how does direct cognition of something that by hypothesis is absolutely simple enable one to grasp that which is intrinsically, irreducibly complex? A popular strategy for fitting necessary truths under the umbrella of God's total sovereignty is to suppose that they are given being by being thought by God. But again, how does a simple God entertain an infinity of distinct ideas?

Panchuk (2019) follows Aquinas (ST Ia.14, 16 and SCG I.38) in supposing that God's knowledge is intuitive, not propositional, in the way that our direct perceptual experience is (or at least naively seems to be). She further argues that the unified character of God's single act of intuition makes intelligible the claim that it subsumes a multiplicity of truths without itself being complex in any way. We may grant the claim (also endorsed by Alston 1986, 290) that the immediacy of God's knowledge makes plausible that it is intuitive and not propositional. We may also acknowledge that intuitive cognition has a natural ontological unity (compare the popular thesis that our own conscious experience has a fundamental unity inconsistent with supposing it to be built up of more basic parts).[10] Even so, absolute simplicity is a stronger thesis than is ontological unity, as is illustrated by the complex character of our own unified experiences. If an intuitive cognition of all truths constitutes a knowledge of the diverse and complex way things are in material creation and among the eternal truths, it will have to manifest a structure that "encodes" that diversity (even though it need not itself be diverse in those ways). Consider only this: God knows the divine essence *and* existing created things. This fundamental divide in reality cannot be encompassed in God's act of intuition if there is nothing in it that 'encodes' conjunction and negation (which immediately entails minimal complexity).[11]

7.1.4 Is It Consistent with God's Loving Concern for the Lives of His Creatures?

It is plausibly fundamental to at least Jewish and Christian religious belief that the existence, actions, concerns, and experiences of each of his image-bearing creatures are of concern to God. (I use "concern" here to signal a very general attitude; it is not meant in such a way as to conflict with the doctrine of divine impassibility.) As we have seen, identity theory entails that God would be intrinsically exactly the same whether or not any such image bearers exist, and regardless of which possible experiences they undergo. These two theses seem to be inconsistent.

This objection is closely related to my earlier skepticism regarding the possibility of an absolutely simple God's knowing a contingent creation.

But its distinctness is suggested by reflecting on the Thomistic doctrine that God knows the world through knowing his own essence. One can see how, as Thomas maintains, God may know all about the character of our world simply through seeing it as one total possible output of his own power while being left to puzzle over how the unique *actuality* of our world among the possibilities is also known in this way. But God's *concern* for existing things is not in this way closely mirrored by concern for merely possible things. To suppose that God's concern extends over all of possibility space is to weaken the boundary between possibility and actuality, and to weaken thereby the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Had God created a different reality, He would have had a different set of creaturely objects of concern, and had He not created, He would have had no such concern. The problem is that concern seems to be an attitude with a distinctive intrinsic character that is directed outward toward its objects and their circumstances, and so it would be a way that God varies intrinsically from world to world.

Rogers' (2020) "neoplatonist" construal of absolute simplicity, mentioned above, can solve this problem— but again at a steep cost. On it, God's willing/knowing/loving of Creation is intrinsic to God, reflecting his causal and epistemic immanence in it. Strict identity is preserved by supposing that God necessarily creates the best and that the best world unfolds deterministically. Given these assumptions, there is no other way God might have been. It is his simple nature to will and love this very created reality no less than it is to will his own goodness.

This completes my review of the central objections to the viability of strict identity theory. None of these objections, in my judgment, has been convincingly overcome. Flying First Class has proven to be exorbitant, warranting our asking whether there may be cheaper ways to get to our destination: an account of the unity of a God who exists wholly *a se*.

7.2 Inseparability of Attributes Without Contingent Intrinsics (Inseparability Theory)

John Duns Scotus defended an account of divine unity that weakens the strict identity theory by replacing

1A God's attributes and His existence are all strictly, numerically identical.

with

1B God's attributes are numerically distinct realities that ground diverse true attributions of God, yet they are not really separable from each other or from His uniquely necessary *a se* mode of existence.

Scotus retains 2A and 3A, although they are not *entailed by* his re-placement thesis:

2A God has no contingent intrinsic features.

and

3A God is never acted upon.

That realities can be "formally distinct" but "really the same" was a signature element of Scotus's metaphysics. Here I will replace Scotus's potentially confusing language of entities being "really the same" with "really inseparable," where the latter is to be understood as "its not being metaphysically possible that they exist apart from each other or the thing in which they reside." I will also ignore certain details in Scotus's own account of this relation and the way he applied it to divine attri-butes, as befits my systematic rather than interpretive purpose of setting forth general approaches to the unity of the divine nature that individual theorists might develop in different ways.[12] The "inseparability theory" affirms that there are in God a plurality of non-separable attributes[13] that serve as distinct bases for non-synonymous predications of God and in some cases as distinct explanatory principles in relation to Creation. Thus, the basis for distinct (true) predications of God is the divine nature, and not (as with the identity theory) merely the workings of creaturely minds.

   On the inseparability theory, God is ontologically prior to his several attributes.[14] To get a clear handle on this theory, it is helpful to reflect on different ways one might conceive the nature of mereologically basic physical entities ("simples," in the contemporary parlance). An electron has four fundamental attributes—charge, mass, spin, and magnetic moment—indeterminate magnitudes. Other particle types also have certain of these attributes with varying magnitudes, and positrons are nearly identical in nature to electrons, differing only in the direction of their charge. If we thought of these attributes as immanent universals, then their being common to distinct natures (their "real separability") suggests that the attributes are prior to any substance (such as an in-dividual electron) that has them. But suppose it were otherwise. Suppose that each of these four attributes was instanced only in one precise magnitude and direction and by electrons alone. Then it would be nat-ural to posit that the electron nature was a natural unity, ontologically prior, or at least not posterior, to any of its defining attributes. The imagined case still differs from that of God on inseparability theory, in that the nature of an electron is capable of multiple instantiation, and so is prior to any individual substance that has it. An individual would be the result of an ontological "joining" of a shareable nature and an

individuating principle (whether prime matter, a haecceity, or a bare particular). But God's nature is not capable of multiple, wholly distinct instantiations, and so his attributes should not be thought of as universals. Instead, they are *more* akin to the elements of trope theory, a rival theory to immanent universals concerning the nature of creaturely substances. Tropes are conceived as dependent qualities that are particular to the substances they characterize. (Every electron has its unique trope of negative charge.) On this account, there are exactly resembling, numerically distinct instances of any type of trope. Here, too, is a point of disanalogy with the divine nature. On the inseparability theory, God is a necessarily existing and necessarily unique instance of divinity—better, God is identical to that formally complex, self-subsisting nature.

The inseparability theory yields clear advantages over the identity theory with respect to two of our four questions. It straightforwardly accommodates our ascription of a plurality of attributes to God. (Austere metaphysicians may judge the notion of metaphysical inseparability to be a substantial "ideological" cost, but it can hardly be judged as more expensive than the identity theorist's "rich yet utterly simple" nature.) And in allowing for a kind of *non-compositional complexity* in the divine nature, it does not engender an immediate puzzle as to how God may have knowledge of complexity. These savings enable the inseparability theorist to travel in the tad less glamorous but more affordable Business Class section. However, by retaining the commitment to God's necessary intrinsic sameness, it cannot also offer an advance on the unsatisfying externalist accounts of God's willing, knowing, and concerned loving of a contingent Creation. Addressing these issues more convincingly will require a further step away from the identity theory.

7.3 Inseparability of Attributes with Wholly Active Contingent Intrinsics (Contingent Intrinsics Theory)

A third approach follows the inseparability theorist by including

1B God's attributes are numerically distinct realities that ground diverse true attributions of God, yet they are not really separable from each other or from His uniquely necessary *a se* mode of existence.

while replacing its

2A God has no contingent intrinsic features.

with

2B God has contingent intrinsic features that partly constitute His free activity, but they are not capable of existence apart from his essence.

Finally, it retains

3A God is never acted upon.

I take this combination of theses to be the best way to explicate the account advanced in Stump (2003). Admittedly, the interpretive question is fraught. Stump takes herself to be exegeting Aquinas's theory of simplicity; she nowhere commits to rejecting 1A let alone affirming 1B; and she defends Aquinas's simplicity doctrine from objections in a way that suggests she *embraces* 1A. But she does reject 2A (2003, 113), and I do not see how God's having contingent intrinsic features may be rendered consistent with the strict identity of his necessary attributes *with his very existence*.[15] Given that her discussion of simplicity at least suggests a view that combines 1B, 2B, and 3A, and in the absence of a clearer proponent of it, I will mine her discussion for ways to elucidate and defend it.

On the contingent intrinsics theory, God timelessly acquires contingent intrinsic features through willing, knowing, and loving the contingent world that He creates, though not by being acted upon by anything in the world.[16] A way that one could elaborate this package is to suppose that while God was free to create other contingent realities (or none at all), any created world, including the actual world, would be wholly determined by God. In this way, God's awareness of and love for creatures in each case would be fully grounded in his wholly determinative but contingent will, conceived as an intrinsically contentful state whose entire source is God himself. The intellectual heirs of scholastic Reformed theology, along with determinism-embracing Thomists such as Garrigou-Lagrange could happily follow that route.[17] Since it appears to be no less consistent with the animating starting point of divine aseity than the identity or inseparability theories while better handling the implications of real contingency, this approach comes at a comfortable Economy Plus fare.

But for many, the price remains too high. By retaining postulate 3A, the contingent intrinsics theory is plausibly at odds with supposing that God's loving awareness of and concern for created reality is *responsive* to the reality known. Stump proposes that divine state/action D is responsive to creaturely state/action C (D occurs "because of" C) provided that, if it were that not-C, then it would or might not have been that D, which does not entail temporal posteriority (116-17). However, the truth of a counterfactual relationship is insufficient for there being an explanatory connection between events or facts.[18] And "D because C" does not appear to hold in the envisioned scenario in particular. In it, God timelessly wills/creates/sustains a world according to an eternal plan, which provides for a large array of individuals whose histories unfold in a particular manner. Among the events willed as part of God's

unchanging plan are the sequence of Hannah's praying to conceive a child, her so conceiving, and her believing that God answered her prayer. The plan informs the willing, and the willing is strictly explanatorily prior to the existence of any worldly individual or event. It is true that God's willing of each element of the three-part sequence involving Hannah is explanatorily connected to his willing the others, insofar as they are all elements of the overarching plan for creation. But explanatory connections among distinct aspects of the one eternal willing do nothing to show that there is an explanatory connection from an *object* of the willing back to some aspect of the willing.

Perhaps Stump will argue that the structure of God's eternal willing and its relationship to what is willed is more complex than I have allowed (simplicity notwithstanding!). God wills that Hannah and other divine image bearers possess free will. God's total willing of creation cannot be *entirely* explanatorily prior to the exercise of creaturely freedom since freedom necessarily lacks sufficient antecedent causes (whether temporal or atemporal). That aspect of God's willing that involves, e.g., the continued existence of Hannah prior to her prayer is indeed explanatorily antecedent to that prayer. But his willing of the conception is informed by, and so explanatorily posterior to, her freely-willed prayer. In general, while certain aspects of God's willing of creation are strictly explanatorily antecedent to any events in creation, many aspects of God's willing that concern events "down the line" of human history are informed by causally undetermined prior events in that history, and so explanatorily posterior to them.

Let us grant for the moment the coherence of this scenario (which posits a complex explanatory interaction between a temporal reality and a wholly atemporal reality) and ask only whether it is consistent with the thesis that God is never acted upon (3A). Stump argues that knowledge of something by way of perceptual awareness requires no element of passive receptivity but is instead wholly active. She maintains that after our environment impinges on our sense organs and information is sent to our brains, our intellect "extracts" content from what is presented to it, rather than being *caused* to go into a representational state. (120-21).

This is plainly wrong. While there is reason to believe that our minds are not purely passive in the process that leads to belief based directly on sensory perception, neither are they wholly active. We actively *process* stimuli based in part on expectations resulting from past experience, cultural shaping, or hard-wired categories and assumptions. But at no stage is there a form of experiential data (a neural counterpart to Aquinas's sensible species) that are simply there, doing nothing, which an acting mind may take from and use as it wills.[19] For the mind to "operate on" them in any way, such data must be of the sort *capable* of being acted on. Indeed, as C.B. Martin (2008) and numerous other recent theorists of causation emphasize, natural causal processes generally involve the *interaction* of

powerful particulars. In some cases, there is a perfect symmetry to the interaction, as when two electrons mutually repel one another with a certain magnitude of the force that continuously varies as a function of their distance. Other cases are less symmetrical, as when the earth and I exert unequal gravitational force on one another. In the latter cases, we may dub the change in one agent as "the effect" where it is particularly pronounced, but "the cause" is not left wholly unchanged. Turning to the case at hand, in the process by which we become perceptually aware of something (a whistle sound, say) and conceptualize it in forming a belief (there is a train approaching from the left behind me), there is a continuous chain of molecular and cellular interactions that inputs to *and* causally triggers cognitive processes (however we conceive their ontology), re-sulting in correlated experiential and doxastic states.

To bolster her position that awareness-knowledge *need* not always in-volve causal receptivity, Stump cites two other kinds of cases: our knowledge of our own pain and God's knowledge of his own existence. How precisely to characterize such forms of self-knowledge is of course controversial. But insofar as we agree with Stump that they do not involve a causal process, we will suppose they rest on a cognitive reflexivity that is peculiar to consciousness: to be in a conscious state of pain just *is* to be aware of one's pain; to be a conscious knower just is to be always aware of one's own existence (even when, in the case of human knowers, we are not always consciously *believing* that we exist). Is there reason to suppose that God's awareness *of his creation* could share the immediacy (precluding causal interaction) of certain forms of self-knowledge, making it unlike human perceptual awareness in this basic structural respect?

God knows created entities "from the inside" in continuously and immediately giving them being. He does not traverse any kind of cog-nitive "distance" to be aware of them, requiring the mediation of something akin to light signals. Even so, since we are assuming that his being-giving activity does not wholly determine each and every state of every created being, the wholly active and immediate character of God's awareness of what He *does* cannot ground His awareness of everything that happens. His knowledge of our contingent acts involves something further that is responsive to them. Nothing that exists is capable of escaping his "gaze"; all that we do necessarily, immediately, and in-fallibly "registers" to Him. It is our divinely-imbued nature as creatures to contribute—causally—to his all-encompassing awareness of a con-tingently unfolding creation. 3A appears to be untenable.

7.4 Inseparability of Attributes with Partly Receptive Contingent Intrinsics (The Dynamic Theory)

For thinkers in the Augustinian-Thomist tradition, the conclusion of the last section will seem not just surprising but demonstrably untenable.

Allowing that God is in any way causally affected by creatures, they contend, entails the falsity of the fundamental theistic axiom that God is a wholly ontologically independent being and the First Cause of all else. But this consequence appears to be resistible. Replace 3A with:

3B God has contingent intrinsic cognitive and affective features that are partly caused by the activities of his free creatures, but those features are not capable of existence apart from his essence.

While creaturely activities causally contribute to those contingent divine features, those activities do not exist or operate independently of God's sovereign control. Instead, they are themselves effects of God's free creative and sustaining activity. This Basic Economy fare package of 1B, 2B, and 3B may be amplified thus:

> God's essential being is the uniquely self-existing unity of numerically distinct but mutually entailing infinite attributes. He is able freely to manifest his perfect power in diverse ways. He changes intrinsically thereby. He also changes through his ongoing engagement with his creation. These changing cognitive and affective states are not entities capable of existing independently of God; they are peculiarly and dependently divine 'modes' – contingent aspects of God, the *potential* for which is fully grounded in the essential and united attributes of God, and (in a qualified but significant sense) the distal, ultimate *cause* of which is God, insofar as God gives being to created entities and knowingly permits them on occasions to exercise their conferred indeterministic powers as they may, thereby affecting his own knowledge of them. In this way, while not omni-determinative, God's nature and wholly free activity are the fundamental source of all contingent aspects of reality, whether in creation or in God himself.

I suggest that, whatever its other shortcomings, the dynamic theory offers a coherent and sufficient response to the fundamental motivation behind the doctrine of simplicity, viz., to secure God's ontological independence of all else. Aseity alone (on a robust understanding) does not entail the identity theory (or even a minimum baseline of the contingent intrinsics theory).[20]

7.5 Costs to the Dynamic Theory in Relation to the Identity Theory?

I identified six theses that bear on the divine unity:

1A God's attributes and His existence are not distinct in *any* ontologically-grounded sense; they are all strictly, numerically identical.

2A God has no contingent intrinsic features.
3A God is never acted upon.

1B God's fundamental attributes are numerically distinct realities that ground diverse true attributions of God, yet they are not really separable from each other or from His uniquely necessary *a se* mode of existence.
2B God has contingent intrinsic features that partly constitute His free activity, but they are not capable of existence apart from his essence.
3B God has contingent intrinsic cognitive and affective features that are partly caused by the activities of his free creatures, but those features are not capable of existence apart from his essence.

The traditional identity ("absolute simplicity") theory embraces the first set of three theses. The inseparability, contingent intrinsics, and dynamic theories result from replacing one or more of those theses with corresponding members of the second set.

Aquinas holds that there are *demonstrative* arguments for the conclusion that there is a being that in different ways is the first and preeminent cause of our world and for the conclusion that such a being must be *absolutely* simple as the identity theory maintains. Their premises and forms of inference are rationally certain. He acknowledges that absolute simplicity renders God wholly incomprehensible to us: we cannot understand how perfect power and knowledge and goodness are strictly identical to each other and to God himself. But he does not find this a perturbing result, since, he suggests, it merely reflects a limitation on our part, and one that is only to be expected. The ways of cognizing that are suited to finite creatures are wholly unsuited for grasping the nature of the infinite Creator.

Aquinas's unperturbed epistemological stance on these questions hangs together. However, the stance of contemporary proponents of the identity theory is apt to be less stable. For those who regard substantive metaphysical intuition and argument (including their favored arguments for theism and absolute simplicity) as generally defeasible, the acknowledgment of the incomprehensibility of absolute simplicity makes them vulnerable to two kinds of challenges.

If we accept identity-based arguments that the kind of entity indicated by explanatory theistic arguments would necessarily be *wholly* incomprehensible to us (or indeed to any intellect other than the entity itself), surely that gives us some reason to suspect that those less-than-certain explanatory arguments involve one or more missteps. An explanation that appeals to an incomprehensible explanans is less than ideal. In the absence of a plausible alternative, it seems natural to reduce one's confidence in the principle that drove one to seek an explanation.

Alternatively (and this is our focus here), insofar as we are disposed to regard the explanatory arguments as fairly compelling, the theoretical unattractiveness of an incomprehensible explanans will naturally lead us to suspect the inference to absolute simplicity. The suspicion is increased given the dubious ways the theory is driven to handle contingency and complexity in divine willing and knowledge (questions 2–3 above). And there is still further reason for religious theists to suspect the inference, given how the theory explicates the central religious teaching of God's love for his individual creatures (question 4).[21]

Some philosophers will find it most attractive on balance to retain the identity theory's secondary doctrines 2A and/or 3A while jettisoning its core and most problematic plank 1A. However, I will restrict my attention to the dynamic theory which rejects them all and consider some of its potential downsides. Are attractive explanatory features lost when we move from the identity theory to the dynamic theory?

7.5.1 Ipsum Esse

A famous Thomist expression of absolute divine simplicity is the identity claim that God is *ipsum esse*, or being itself. Thomists see this claim as capturing God's radical transcendence of creation. God is not merely the most impressive being there is among the many other lesser beings. He alone *is* Being, and other created entities exist by sharing in his being in diverse limited ways. The dynamic theory denies that God is numerically identical to any of his attributes, and so the *ipsum esse* formula seems inapt. However, it may express God's transcendence by saying that God is Underived Being, meaning the uniquely necessary *a se* perfection of being that is the fount and sustainer of all other beings. To complain that this makes God out to be merely one (albeit standout) being among others is at best grossly misleading. It maintains that God is primal being and the sovereign, continuous bestower of all derivative beings.

7.5.2 Non-Competing Cause of Causes

On another Thomist formula pointing to divine transcendence, God is "the cause of causes." His outflowing primary causality does not compete with the secondary causality of creatures, as it is precisely in his giving of being to those creatures *and* their activity that they are able to act at all.

The dynamic theory agrees that God gives being to substances and their acts and for this reason, He truly is the cause of causes. However, it also contends that creatures continuously cause changes in God's awareness of his creation. God's creative power is necessarily yoked with the potential for receptive awareness of what He has made. There can be

no God-breathed creatures who lack the power to be present throughout their worldly unfolding to God's comprehensive gaze—it is built into being a creature as such. The dynamic theory further maintains that there is divine willing that extends beyond his willing things into being and is responsive to free creaturely acts, a willing that may result in local patterns of events that outstrip the natural potentiality of creaturely powers.

I do not see that this acceptance of two-way interactive causal flow between God and creatures entails a problematic causal "competition" between God and his own creation. Affirming a creaturely power to be present to God's awareness—in a way that we are unable to theorize about, as it is intrinsic to creaturehood as such, and fundamentally is grounded in the limitless power of God—is not to imagine that they have a "rival" power (from nowhere?) that enables them to "constrain" or "compel" God in any way or to any degree. God sovereignly wills there to be free creatures and He responds to them in turn as He pleases. The dynamic theory *is* inconsistent with an ambitious Thomist picture on which (i) God's primary causality is wholly sufficient for all that happens but (ii) human freedom is allegedly preserved because God causes our acts "in a manner consistent with their character as free acts," including their being no *antecedent* sufficient causes.[22] Space prevents me from discussing here why I find this picture to be untenable. The dynamic theory does maintain, to the contrary, that some worldly phenomena are *partly* (efficiently) caused by God and partly caused by creatures, rather than supposing that all events are such that they are *wholly* caused by God *and* (on a distinct "level" of causation) have wholly creaturely causes. That of course raises knotty questions concerning grace and free will, and it is consistent with a variety of answers to them. But the theory can and does affirm that God's *primary* causality is radically different from, and wholly prior to, all creaturely causation.

7.5.3 *Goodness Itself*

Stump (2003, 127-8) argues that the absolute simplicity claim that God *is* goodness itself provides an alternative to the unsatisfactory theses of theological voluntarism, on the one hand, and mere theological re-cognition and approval of objective moral truth, on the other. God's very being is the goodness for the sake of which He acts and by which He commands and judges our actions.

Although it posits complexity in God's nature, and so cannot say that goodness is the whole of God's nature, the dynamic theory can hold much the same understanding of God's relationship to moral truth as the identity theory. Perfect goodness is an attribute of God, inseparable from him, and necessarily unique to Him. He is the exemplar and source of all limited expressions of goodness and the goal of all things.

7.5.4 Necessity

Stump (2003) argues that the absolute simplicity claim that God *is* his own existence (1A)

> can supply what Clarke's version of the cosmological argument lacks, the explanation of the necessity of God's existence. The answer to the question 'Why does God exist?' is that he cannot not exist, and the reason he cannot not exist is that he is his own nature because he is simple. Since his nature is internally consistent, it exists in all possible worlds, and so God, who is his nature, exists in all possible worlds. The necessity of God's existence is not one more characteristic of God which needs an explanation of its own but is instead a logical consequence of God's simplicity."
>
> (2003, 129–30)

This passage is difficult to interpret. It reads like a kind of modal ontological argument, with an implied premise that any nature that is internally consistent exists in all possible worlds (whether or not there is an object having that nature). It is then observed that the premise has *concrete existence* implications in the unique case of God, who *is* his own nature. But it is offered to overcome a perceived shortcoming in the Leibniz-Clarke cosmological argument from the contingency of the universe, and it draws on the Thomist claim that God is his own existence, which is most naturally at home in the context of first-cause arguments. If there *is* an ontological argument here, then of course it will be open to reasonable challenge, and the skeptic is most likely to challenge the implied premise that internally consistent natures exist of necessity.

Whether or not she is offering such an argument, I think Stump's central point is this: Clarke argues that there must be a necessarily existing being at the foundation of contingent reality taken as a whole, since otherwise it would lack a sufficient reason, which is rationally absurd. But (thinks Stump) we need some understanding of how any concrete entity could be like that—be such as to exist of necessity. Failing that, we haven't really shown how the Principle of Sufficient Reason might be fully embraced. The claim that God is his own existence fills that lacuna because it does not simply tack on *necessary existence* to a being conceived in other terms; rather, existence is integral to the envisioned being by being identical to it.

Notice that Stump hasn't shown that the radical identity claim is the *only* way to make existence integral to a concept of God. And it seems to me that, while her challenge to Clarke is a reasonable one, it is comfortably met by the dynamic theory. A unified, underived being that possesses the full panoply of inseparable perfections; that is the ground

of all actual existence, intelligible order, and value; and whose creative capacity is plenitudinous—such a being is a highly plausible candidate for being a metaphysically necessary being. Indeed, it is a plausible candidate for being the *ground of all possibility*—it suggests, that is, a theory of the nature of modal truth.[23]

7.5.5 Perfection

The dynamic theory implies that God is mutable and so temporal. For Thomists, the most direct reason for embracing timelessness and immutability is that they follow from their rival theory of absolute simplicity, which theory is the foundation of theorizing about God's attributes. Obviously, this implication cannot serve as a reason for rejecting the dynamic theory. But another general, Augustinian type of reason advanced for these doctrines is that an atemporal life would be superior to a temporal life in one respect or another (e.g., as not involving regret over what is now past, or the need to wait for what is anticipated), and so befitting of the perfect reality that is God. I cannot adequately address these considerations here.[24] But whatever force these arguments have on first consideration evaporates if the notion of an atemporal life cannot be coherently sustained or proves to be (as I have argued) inconsistent with God's knowing and responding to a contingent creation gifted with a freedom that imitates that of its Creator. Furthermore, traditional Platonic and Aristotelian reasons for thinking that perfection is necessarily timeless can be seen without much difficulty as pointing only to a more limited conclusion, easily embraced by a proponent of the dynamic theory: God's *way* of being temporal cannot be like creaturely ways of being temporal in the noted deficient respects. Here we treat God's temporality on a par with God's power and knowledge—as a pure perfection that is prior to and more eminent than its finite, creaturely counterparts.

Aquinas argues that potentiality of any kind directly implies imperfection. A being with unactualized potentiality is incomplete and, since it can move to actuality in the relevant respect only by the action of another being (or some distinct part of itself in actuality), it is not wholly independent. (ST 1a 3, 1) As Stump (2003, 124-25) argues, he cannot be supposing that mere contingency implies potentiality in his intended sense, since he believes that God might have created something other than our universe or have created nothing at all. In all possible scenarios, God wills himself. Whatever else he may will is (as Johnston 2019 puts it) "adverbial" on that fundamental act: it is a variable *way* of willing himself. All these scenarios involve the selfsame divine act, intrinsically considered, rather than the activation of partly distinct creative "potentialities."

The dynamic theory sharply breaks with Aquinas's no-potentiality doctrine by affirming that God acquires contingent intrinsic features in

what He wills and knows and loves, and, furthermore, that He does so partly through the agency of his creatures. It envisions the divine nature as encompassing the intrinsically determining potentialities to create or not; to create in any of widely diverse ways; and in certain limited respects to be affected by an unfolding creation and to engage responsively with it in turn. There is a perfectly good sense in which the divine nature as envisioned by this theory is not intrinsically "complete," and so not "perfect" in every way in the root etymological sense. However, it is not obvious that this implies imperfection in the evaluative sense. On the dynamic theory, God's nature is a necessary unity of all pure, limitless perfections. Among these perfections is a creative power whose expression necessarily carries with it the potential for receptivity and responsiveness to the creaturely activity God sustains. God chooses to engage a creation gifted with a limited measure of God's own freedom not in order to "fulfill" himself in a way that extends beyond His nature as such but simply as a form of delighted play, an exercise of perfect freedom, in which his own necessary, self-contained joy might be shared by creatures. There are realized and unrealized possibilities inherent to such play, but God experiences no loss at what is not selected, for He has no antecedently unmet needs or hopes.

Is there a better, because more "complete" way than this to be? Not if the identity theory cannot make good sense of divine creation. For then "absolute completeness" of being either is of less than maximal value (because a *limiting* characteristic, inconsistent with the ability to outwardly act) or forces a repudiation of the possibility of creation in favor of a necessitarian monism. What evaluative perfection demands is partly contested, and so it cannot be used as an independent criterion by which to adjudicate between theories of divine unity.

I conclude that the dynamic theory has marked explanatory advantages over the identity theory without immediately evident and decisive downsides. (I do not suggest that I have canvassed all relevant considerations, let alone to have treated them thoroughly.)[25] But I also acknowledge that it has a formidable theoretical challenge: to work out a satisfactory account of God's relationship to time. The challenge will appear differently through the lenses of the different metaphysical theories of time itself. An adequate theory of time must accommodate in a plausible way *both* the success of fundamental physical theory that treats time and space as united aspects of a single manifold and the implicit commitments of our being causally effective and morally responsible persons. (By *my* lights, those desiderata jointly point toward modified versions of either growing block or presentism and away from all forms of three-dimensional or four-dimensional eternalism.) An adequate theory of God's temporality plausibly should have it that time—or perhaps "God's time"—is fundamentally a mode of God's own being, rather than being an external dimension that conditions Him as it does

his creatures. Assuming we can manage all that, the dynamic theory should prove attractive to the budget-minded metaphysical traveler.[26]

Notes

1 Plantinga (1980) and Bergmann and Brower (2006) suggest that the motivation for unity doctrines includes a commitment to divine *sovereignty* – the dependence of all things other than God upon God – alongside aseity. As with aseity, the nature of God's sovereignty is disputed, and sovereignty enters unity arguments only when a theorist is pressing a maximally strong version of the doctrine. For relevant discussion, see §4 below.

2 There are other arguments for 'absolute' divine simplicity (from God's perfection and supposed pure actuality), and I will discuss them in due course.

For example, Plantinga's (1980) famous objection to the doctrine of absolute simplicity as entailing the absurdity that God is an abstract property has been laid to rest, the result of his imposing a general account of predication that is highly debatable and that the doctrine's proponents in any case rejected.

3 As we shall see in the text below, one prominent contemporary interpreter of Aquinas contends that Aquinas rejects 2A. I discuss the non-interpretive issue of whether 2A follows from 1A in the beginning of section 7.3. In any case, the package of 1A-3A has had wide influence and accords with what many contemporary philosophical theologians mean to be advancing or criticizing.

4 William Alston (1993) makes this point.

5 The identity theorist with nominalist sympathies of course has available the reply: that there can be a multiplicity of widely-varying forms of resemblance to a being utterly devoid of complexity is *primitively* true, requiring no ontological underwriting. While I lack such sympathies, I do not think the worry in the text goes away by adopting nominalism. Instead, it suggests that the nominalist should recognize broadly 'structural' (including but not limited to mereological) constraints on particular kinds of resemblance facts, on pain of theoretical vacuity.

While not finding it sufficient to dissolve the present worry, I commend to the reader Brian Leftow's (2006) careful, extended grappling with it in an Augustinian-Platonic mode; see especially his discussion of distinct partial representations of an object resulting from differences in representational style and media (373).

6 God would know that it is contingently true that nothing exists other than Himself. The content externalist strategy will presumably propose that this bit of knowledge consists in God's knowing Himself together with the fact that nothing dependently exists.

7 A natural extension in the perfect divine case of what Anscombe (1963, 87-8) calls "executive knowledge" in the human case.

8 As Rob Koons pointed out to me, the thesis that God is directly, non-representationally aware of entities – the counterpart of naive realist theories of human perception – is quite plausible. I do not mean to be challenging that thesis here. My point as regards God's knowledge is that contingent, quasi-perceptual awareness will induce cognition over the objects of awareness, and cognitive states of this latter kind are not plausibly identified with external God-world relations.

9 Rogers is sensitive to the concern as regards human freedom and tentatively suggests a way to reconcile causally undetermined human choices

with absolute simplicity (2020, 318–21). I am not confident that I under-stand her proposal, but it appears to me to imply a modification of sim-plicity, as follows: God's eternal intrinsic state of knowing is partly shaped by what free creatures do. But she doesn't acknowledge the im-plication that there are, after all, a multiplicity of possible worlds (it's just that they are limited to possible branchings off the initial segment of our world that God wholly determines). And if that is her envisioned scenario, it further implies that God might have been intrinsically different in whatever way is required to be aware of the different contingent choices and their aftermath. She goes on to suggest that the best option for the classical theist might be to embrace compatibilism concerning free will and determinism, a move Brower (2009) also suggests may be neces-sary (without endorsing it).

10 On the variety of possible 'unity of consciousness' theses, see Bayne and Chalmers (2003).

11 Jeff Brower (personal communication) suggested that this objection to the identity theory is parallel to David Lewis's charge (1986, 180) that the view on which possible worlds are abstract mereological simples (a special case of propositions) that 'just do' represent different complex contents amounts to 'believing in magic' – a charge that hasn't succeeded in moving many me-taphysicians towards Lewis's alternative on which they are mereologically complex concrete realities. But I don't see his charge and mine as parallel. A proponent of worlds as abstracta accepts that they have *non-mereological* structure precisely corresponding to their representational content.

12 It also allows us to neatly sidestep Ockham's attack on the consistency of Scotus's doctrine of real-but-non-numerical *identity* that is reminiscent of Gareth Evan's (1978) attack on the consistency of the notion of vague identity. For discussion of the details of Scotus's account of the formal dis-tinction and its application to the nature of God (in, e.g., *Ordinatio* I, d. 8, pars 1, q. 4), see Adams (1987, 931-4), Cross (2005, 99–114) and Steele and Williams (2019). (Adams also usefully summarizes Ockham's critique on 934-41.)

13 As well as transcendentals, if one follows Scotus in distinguishing these from attributes, a distinction that needn't detain us here.

14 In formal respects, the doctrine is similar to the 'priority monism' defended by Jonathan Schaffer (2010), on which the universe is ontologically prior to its many physical *parts*. Schaffer's priority thesis is more problematic, since it violates a central intuition we have concerning the structure of composite objects. (Fowler 2015 applies Schaffer's more radical doctrine of part-to-whole priority – unwisely, methinks –to the divine nature.)

15 One might entertain the thesis that God's necessary attributes are strictly identical to each other but not to God Himself, but it is doubtful that this will cohere with the commitment to contingent intrinsic states. It would have it that, e.g., God's knowledge is identical to God's mercy, while God's knowing that you are reading these words is something wholly other than his ex-tending mercy to you in regards to your sins.

16 To many readers of Aquinas, that may sound like an affirmation that God acquires accidents and is in potentiality with respect to those He might have acquired through a different creative action, contrary to explicit teaching of Aquinas. However, Stump gives textual evidence for thinking that 'accident' must have a more specific technical meaning for Aquinas than contingent intrinsic feature. See Stump (2003, 111-15 and 124-25).

17 Garrigou-Lagrange (1943), discussed in Stump (2003, 118–122).

18 Its insufficiency for the one event to be the *cause* of another is well-known. (See discussion in Menzies and Beebee 2019.) The range of counterexamples given also apply to the claim that there is a non-causal sort of explanatory relationship.

19 As Brian Leftow has suggested (personal communication), we may perhaps imagine a mind that has a passive data set *built into* it, on which it operates in certain cognitive processes. But this scenario is insufficient for the Stumpian thesis at issue, precisely because that thesis requires a contingent *uptake* of data from without – an interaction with a reality that is not wholly internal.

20 Thanks to Daniel Rubio for pressing me on the question of aseity under the dynamic Theory. We can agree that the theory is inconsistent with a maximalist understanding of aseity ('absolute aseity'), even as I resist the Thomist contention that my qualified alternative fundamentally alters the concept of God.

21 As Thomas Reid (1997/1764, 23) memorably expressed it: "A traveller who has good judgment may mistake his way, and be led unawares into a wrong track; and while the road is fair before him, he may go on without suspicion, and be followed by others; but when it ends in a coal-pit, it requires no great judgment to know that he hath gone wrong, nor perhaps to find out what misled him."

22 For development and defense of this picture, see Koons (2002) and Grant (2019).

23 See. e.g., Pruss (2006), Ch.19; O'Connor (2008), Ch.2; and the more ambitious theory developed in Leftow (2015), a massive tour de force.

24 See Leftow (1991), Ch.12, for the fullest development of them in recent philosophy.

25 Koons (2018) observes that the identity theory of unity is (surprisingly!) quite amenable to the traditional relational theory of the divine Trinity. Whether the dynamic theory can also be made hospitable to the latter is an important but difficult question that I cannot address here.

26 This chapter has substantially benefited from trenchant criticism and suggestions from Daniel Berntson, Andrew Chignell, Anthony Fisher, Daniel Korman, Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, Katherin Rogers, Carlo Rossi, and Daniel Rubio, and especially from the extensive written comments from Jeffrey Brower, Brian Leftow, and this volume's editors. Some of that feedback was received at the *VII Colloquium on Analytic Metaphysics* (Santiago, Chile) and the *Rutgers-Princeton Philosophy of Religion Colloquium*, both held online in 2021.

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8 A Metaphysical Inquiry into Islamic Theism

Enis Doko and Jamie B. Turner

8.1 Introduction

The effervescent and dynamic history of Islamic theology in its formative years bears witness to organic, philosophical, intra-religious, and politically charged developments over the question of God's nature. Following the sudden and explosive expansion of Islamic civilization in the first 200 years since its advent, Muslims quickly developed a religious and political unity which saw them govern over large sways of disparate religious communities, with Muslims being a technical religious minority political ruling class. This rather distinct socio-political context in which Muslims found themselves gave rise to a whole host of developments in both religious and secular disciplines. To be sure, the religious diversity within the Umayyad and Abbasid empires did not impose or necessarily act as the primary influence upon these developments, but it and the combination of organic dialogue from within, followed by a touch here and there of politico-religious dogmatism (i.e., the *mīhna* of the Mu'tazila), led to a theological conversation which oversaw the flowering of distinct Islamic theological schools, and the advent of Muslim peripatetic philosophies.

This chapter aims to draw on the critical threads of those vibrant theological conversations within the formative years of Islamic thought in considering the different theological models of the Divine within the broader Islamic tradition under the purview of classical theism as it is understood today in the contemporary philosophy of religion. In doing so, it makes reference to the major strands within the theological (*'ilm al-kalām* & *atharī scripturalism*) and philosophical (*falsafa*) schools of the Islamic tradition. It aims to consider how these different trends, schools, and thinkers construct a model of God in light of the classical and neo-classical theistic model of God.

8.2 Muslim Scholastic Theology

Important schools of Islamic theological thought within Umayyad and Abbasid early Muslim society emerged from within the philo-theological

discipline coined *'ilm al-kalām*. *Kalām* which is usually translated as Islamic scholastic or speculative theology, is the study of the fundamental doctrines (*'aqāid*) of Islamic belief. The main purpose of *kalām* was to establish the central theological tenets of Islam and defend them against other worldviews. It emerged in the eighth century partly due to Muslims engaging with other cultures and religious traditions living under Muslim rule[1].

One of the central issues scholars of *kalām* (*mutakallimūn*) were concerned with was properly understanding and articulating the nature God (Allah). In several passages the Qur'ān criticizes particular religious communities for failing to properly predicate those attributes which truly belong to God (cf., Qur'ān 39:67, 22:74). Therefore, the *mutakallimūn* thought it crucial to know, understand and articulate in proper philosophical terms, the nature of the divine attributes. An additional motivation for studying the attributes of God was in distinguishing Islamic monotheism from the Christian Trinitarianism criticized again in Qur'ān: "They have certainly disbelieved who say, "God is the third of three." And there is no god except one God. And if they do not desist from what they are saying, there will surely afflict the disbelievers among them a painful punishment." (4:73).

In many passages of the Qur'ān the oneness or unity of God (*tawḥīd*), as well as His transcendence (*tanzīh*) is heavily emphasized. The *mutakallimūn* drew particularly on the idea of transcendence of God in addressing theological literalist who either ascribed corporeal attributes to God (known as *mujassima*), or those who attributed anthropomorphic attributes to God (known as *mushabbiha*). These and similar worries led to the emergence of the dispute over the relationship between the essence of God (*zāt*) and the attributes of God (*sifāt*). Let's refer to this dispute as simply "the problem of the attributes."

The problem of the attributes was first introduced and discussed by the earliest school of *kalām*, namely the school. The Mu'tazilite school was essentially a theological movement which founded at Basra century by Wāsil ibn 'Atā' (d. 748 C.E.), which emphasized reason and human freedom (in the libertarian sense). The Mu'tazilites accepted that God may be predicated of attributes in some sense, but unlike their later Sunni theological counterparts, they denied that a distinction could be had between the essence of God and his attributes. For them God's knowledge/omniscience (*'ilm*), his power/omnipotence (*qudra*), his will (*irāda*), his speech (*kalām*) etc. are in fact (that is ontologically speaking) identical to the essence of God. In other words, there is no distinct attribute of knowledge, power, or will; God is powerful by/with his essence, has knowledge by/with his essence, has will by/with his essence (al-Shahrastānī 1993: I 44–46). But why did they insist on this equivalence between the essence and attributes? Well, the Mu'tazilites grounded this

distinction in their most important theological principle: the principle: of *tawhīd* (unity and uniqueness of God).

There seem to be at least three distinct arguments in support of their position based on the principle of *tawhīd*. The first argument is hinted at by Wāsil ibn 'Atā' himself, who declares that whosoever accepts distinct attributes besides God, believes in two eternal beings and two gods, and hence he is a polytheist (al-Shahrastānī 1993: I, 46). This idea was later developed by the later Mu'tazilites in a more rigorous fashion (al-Shahrastānī 1993: I, 44–45). Their argument can be summarized as follows:

1   If there are distinct attributes of God besides his essence, then they are either coeternal (*qadīm*) with his essence (*zāt*) or they have a beginning in time and hence are created (*hādith*).
2   God cannot have created attributes.
3   Therefore, if there are distinct attributes of God besides his essence, then they must be coeternal with his essence.
4   By the principle of *tawhīd* nothing can be coeternal with God's essence.
5   Therefore, the attributes of God cannot be distinct from his essence.

One could also argue that the view of God having distinct attributes clashes with the transcendence of God, as it implies that attributes are similar to Him in that they are also eternal. The Mu'tazilites believed that attributing distinct attributes to God is analogous to the Trinity or to some kind of Dualism and therefore commits the same theological error which violates pure monotheism.

The Second argument is also based on uniqueness and transcendence of God (al-Jabbār 1996, 162). If we accept that God has distinct properties from His essence, then He becomes like other material objects in the world. Every object in the universe has distinct attributes which are other than their essence, as such if God has attributes separate from His essence, He will be like any other (contingent) material entity. But given His uniqueness this is unacceptable, so His attributes must be distinct from His essence. The Third argument is similar to the second one. Every object's essence in the universe depends on their attributes to exercise power. I am able to write this line of text thanks to my attributes of power and knowledge. But this cannot be accepted for God, because this would mean that His essence depends on something external to Him in order for Him to exercise any power.

What exactly does it mean to say God's attributes are equivalent to His essence? If we say that God's essence is His power, and His essence is His knowledge, does that not it imply that His power is same as His knowledge? The Mu'tazilites took different philosophical approaches in

order to try and make sense of this apparent problem. Let us analyze the three most historic examples.

The first approach was to use negative theology and interpret attributes as negations (*ta'tīl*). This approach has been attributed to Abū'l Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d. 850 C.E.), and Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 845 C.E.). On this thesis, when we say that "God is omnipotent," we mean that "God is not incapable," by saying "God is omniscient," we mean "God is not ignorant," etc. More precisely, when we say that God is omnipotent we negate any incapability from Him, when we say He is omniscient we negate any kind of ignorance from His essence etc. (al-Ash'arī, 1980, 166–167, 485).

The second approach was to take an extreme position and accept nominalism about the attributes of God. This approach is usually attributed to Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 916 C.E.). In this approach, the adjectives used for God are our characterizations or our words. In other words, when we use the word omniscient about God, we are not actually doing anything beyond describing and naming Him, we are not attributing an attribute to Him (Gardet 1965, 570.).

The third approach was taken up by Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 933 C.E.), and can be termed his "theory of aspects (*aḥwāl*)." According to this theory, there is a third concept besides essence and attributes, what he calls aspects. Aspects are interesting because according to Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī they are thought to be ontologically situated between existent things and non-existent things. This is so because they do not have independent existence from an essence, that is, they do not have an independent reality. He seems to suggest that aspects connect attributes to an essence. Since they do not have independent existence, he believes that they are neither eternal nor created. One cannot even say that they exist, nor that they do not exist. This discourse of existence or eternity applies to things that do have independent existence. But we cannot say that they do not exist either, because in another sense they do. They are related with an essence and make possible knowledge and discourse about the essence of God (al-Shahrastānī, 199: I, 82).

The Mu'tazilites' approach to the problem of the attributes was opposed by the Sunni schools of *kalām*. The Sunni *kalām* tradition is constituted by two distinct theological schools: the Ash'ari and the Maturidi school. The Ash'ari school was established by Abū'l-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936 C.E.) in Baghdad, while Maturidi school was established by Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944 C.E.) in Samarkand. Sunni schools of *kalām* held that the attributes of God are distinct and additional to the essence of God. God is powerful by/with His omnipotence, He knows via His omniscience, etc. They deny the Mu'tazilite claim that God knows or exercises power with His essence. They also acknowledge the eternity of God's attributes, for them no attribute of God has a beginning in time.

But in order to meet the aforementioned Mu'tazilite argument based on the principle of *tawhīd* they denied that attributes exist as separate things. For them attributes of God while distinct from God's essence, do not have separate existence from the essence of God. They would usually say that God's attributes are eternal together with the essence of God to reinforce this point. (al-Māturīdī, 2001, 6). They insisted that the trinity is completely different to their conception of God, and assumed the existence of single essence, while the trinity involves three distinct persons each with a unique essence.

Sunni schools of *kalām* were also careful not to fall into anthropomorphism. As such they insisted that when interpreting Quranic verses, one should keep in mind the following principles:

i God is not an object, i.e., he is not composed of parts, He is a complete unity (*wāhid*).
ii God is not in space.
iii God does not possess accidents (*a'rād*), nor is he an accident.
iv Direction cannot be attributed to God.
v God does not change.

The position of the Sunni schools was developed as a response to the Mu'tazilite conception of God. Hence, they supported their position by attacking the Mu'tazilite assimilation of essence and attributes of God. The Sunni schools' prime argument in this context can be summarized as follows:

1 God has a single essence and many attributes.
2 If God's attributes are the same as His essence, then either God's attributes are part of His essence, or are they are identical to His essence.
3 They cannot be part of His essence, since this will imply that God's essence is a composite object which goes against His unity.
4 They cannot be the same with His essence, since this will imply that essence and attributes are the same thing, but given their plurality this is impossible.
5 Therefore, God's attributes cannot be the same as His essence.

The above argument wouldn't work against Mu'tazilites who are nominalist about attributes, such as Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī. Most of the Sunni *mutakallimūn* actually criticized the Mu'tazilites on this point, charging them with denying the attributes of God i.e., *ta'tīl*. For them this stance is not acceptable because it goes against scripture: How can God be omniscient if He does not know (anything)? Saying God is omniscient but he does not know is like saying that an object is red but it does not have redness. According to these Sunni theologians, the Mu'tazilite view

implies that "God" and "God is omnipotent" are saying the same thing. But they argued this is absurd. (Ibn Hazam 1982, 2:295).

Let us now summarize more generally the conceptions of God defended by different schools of *kalām*. The Ash'arites emphasized the absolute will and omnipotence of God[2]. Nothing can limit his power and will. As such, they subscribed to a strong divine voluntarism. There are no objective moral values which can limit the will and power of God. Good is what God commands and evil is what He forbids. God is just and merciful by definition. The truth of moral values depends on the will of God, if He decides to make lying good, then it will be good. God has a unique nature that transcends human reason and understanding. Also, His will is completely free, there is nothing which constraints it, thus His commands and actions cannot be predicted by human reason. Therefore, moral duties can only be learned from scripture and only humans who are exposed to scripture can be held responsible for their actions. We should note that while the Ash'arite school stresses the incapability of human reason to understand the will of the God, they do value reason. Reason is thought to be our God-given faculty and should be employed in gaining knowledge. In fact, later Ash'arite theologians stressed the importance of the rational demonstration of the existence of God and the prophethood of the Muhammad (pbuh). For them belief in God or prophethood based on scripture or tradition is epistemically unacceptable. The Ash'arite schools' emphasis on God's also power leads to an occasionalist divine action model. God is said to be the only efficient cause in the universe, even simple acts such as lifting a finger are caused directly by God. Despite the fact that everything is directly caused by God, Ash'arites believe that humans are responsible for the results of their actions, which God chooses to perform with them. When God performs some action using them, they acquire (*kasb*) the act. The Ash'arite school is the most popular theological school historical, and as a result many tend to see it as "the Islamic conception of God." But there are other conceptions of God in the Islamic theological tradition as well shall see.

The Mu'tazilites conception of God emphasized justice rather than omnipotence[3]. Therefore, they embraced the existence of objective morality and defended a sort of natural law theory or ethical rationalism as opposed to divine voluntarism. For the Mu'tazilites, God's will is limited by those moral values existent in the world. Both humans and God are responsible for making moral judgments. While humans, due to their limited reason, can sin and act immorally, an omniscient God who is devoid of such limitation can never act in any immoral fashion. In other words, even if God lies it will still be wrong to lie, therefore God will never lie. While all Mu'tazilites agree on this point, they are divided into two camps regarding the question of whether God has power to sin. Some Mu'tazilites such as Ibrahim

an-Nazzam and al-Jahiz claimed that God has no power to sin because it is impossible for God to sin. While other Mu'tazilites such as Abd al-Jabbar believed that God has power to sin, but he will never exercise that power. Since moral values are objective, they can be known by human reason. While scripture is an important expositor of moral values, human reason is capable of discovering moral values on its own (which brings into question the need for revelation). Hence, humans are responsible for their actions even if they do not receive revelation. The Mu'tazilite insistence on justice rather than omnipotence resulted in another sharp difference from Ash'ari school. They embraced libertarian freedom about human agents. According to Islamic teachings, this life is a test in which our deeds are weighed and we either deserve paradise or hell based on our actions (cf., Qur'ān 29:2–3). Mu'tazilites believed that this test can only be fair and just if we humans have complete control over our actions in a libertarian sense. Mu'tazilites therefore denied occasionalism, and believed that we both intend and cause our actions. Mu'tazilites like the Ash'arite school, also stressed the importance of using reason to demonstrate the existence of God and prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh).

The Maturidite conception of God emphasized the wisdom of God over absolute omnipotence[4]. They appear to defend some kind of divine command theory akin to contemporary modified divine command theory. According to them, God is wise, and as such His commands and actions reflect His wisdom. Justice is a direct result of the wisdom of God. Morality is rooted in the commands of God, but they are not arbitrary and follow from divine wisdom. Human reason cannot completely grasp God's decisions, nevertheless, it can know moral values independent of scripture. Thus, while reason can grasp the existence of God and some moral values we need revelation, because human desires can divert the intellect and may need correction. We also need revelation to get to know things of God that are above our intellect. Maturidites were moderate evidentialists: while they believed that reason can demonstrate the existence of God and prophethood, not everyone has an intellectual duty to do so. As such, not everyone is responsible to demonstrate the existence of God. The Maturidite school was occasionalist like the Ash'arite school, but their insistence on wisdom and objective justice required libertarian freedom. Therefore, according to the Maturidite school human intentions are exceptions, and they are not caused by God. God creates all the possibilities, but humans intend on one of these possibilities, and God realizes that intention. Therefore, when I intent to lift my finger, this intention is free and is not caused by God. However, I have no power to lift my finger, God lifts it.

In summary, the conception of God present in the tradition of *kalām* is one that straddles between classical and neo-classical theism[5,6].

For where the Mu'tazilite thinkers emphasised God's transcendence through a doctrine of divine simplicity – equating God's essence and attributes as one and the same, the Sunni *mutakallimūn* of the Ash'arite and Maturidite traditions differed. Although they resolutely affirmed God's unique otherness by typically reinterpreting anthropomorphic scriptural verses or merely ascribing their intended meanings to God without anthropomorphic affirmation, and they rendered the divine outside of space-time—they did not affirm a doctrine of *divine simplicity* in the Mu'tazilite sense. Rather, they sort to uphold the doctrine that God is one in essence, while qualified with a multiplicity of divine attributes which are neither the same as nor wholly distinct from His essence.

8.3 Muslim Scriptural Theology

In outlining the position of Muslim scriptural theology concerning the metaphysics of the divine, we will orient the discussion toward the 14th Century Damascene theologian Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 C.E.). The reason being, is that Ibn Taymiyya more so than any other theological representative of this tradition, elucidated this scripture-centered theology in the conceptual framework of Muslim scholastic theology (*kalām*). In a sense, Ibn Taymiyya represents the intellectual heights of this tradition, as he is arguably the first and finest Traditionalist to really expound the tenets of Islamic Traditionalism in the conceptual language of the philosophical-theologians. Moreover, as Sherman Jackson notes, after Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855 C.E.) Ibn Taymiyya is "the most influential Traditionalist theologian in Muslim history … [And] remains the prism through which all modern understandings, Muslim or non-Muslim alike, of the Traditionalist legacy is invariably filtered" (Jackson 2009, 135).

Ibn Taymiyya's scripture-centred conception of God begins with his understanding of divine oneness or unity (*tawḥīd*). Concerning the latter, Ibn Taymiyya holds that there is a divine unity and uniqueness present in the affirmation of the particular names and attributes of God. This position is captured in the following Qur'ānic verse (42:11): "there is nothing like him: He is the All Hearing, the All seeing." Ibn Taymiyya (1999, 68–9) lists a number of Qur'anic verses in order to establish the transcendence or otherness (*tanzih*) of God, whilst negating univocal comparison to Him:

No one is comparable to Him. (112:4)

So worship Him: be steadfast in worshipping Him? Do you know of any equal to Him? (19:65)

> *So do not set up comparisons to God: God knows and you do not.*
> (16:74)

> *So do not attribute to God equals while you know.* (2:22)

Roughly, the idea is that although hearing and seeing may be predicated of God, the nature of the divine hearing and seeing is of such a kind that it stands out from all creation. Thus, an affirmation of the divine oneness, uniqueness, and particularity is upheld when predicating attributes to the divine nature. Indeed, it is a matter of faith that one does not compare His attributes with those of His creation, "for He, glory be to Him, has no likeness, no comparison, and no partner/associate" (1999, 59). Ibn Taymiyya resolutely insists that God is "unlike anything else with respect to all of his qualities" (Ibn Taymiyya 1999, 85), and that "there is nothing in His essence of His creations and nothing in His creations of His essence" (Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 2:126).

The second of these categories emphasizes God's sovereign unity or *tawḥīd* in the realm of worship and servitude: that God is be revered and worshiped not in tandem with any other, but as one without partner or associate to rival His holiness and majesty. In simple terms, it is the idea then that God and God alone, without associate or intermediary, is the proper object of our worship. Ibn Taymiyya sometimes refers to this aspect of God's oneness as *tawḥīd al-ilāhiyya* i.e., unity of the Godhead, (1995, 2:45). He stresses that the word *ilāh*—which is principally found in the declaration of faith that is the bedrock of Islamic belief: "there is no deity (*ilāh*) worthy of worship except God"—is to be rendered in the sense just indicated (1995, 3:101). That is to say, *ilāh* is not to be understood as simply denoting *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*, but also *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*. That God is not merely singled out as one in being the one Creator, but crucially for Ibn Taymiyya also as "the one worshipped" (*al-ma'būd*), (1995, 10:70).

Finally, the aspect of *tawḥīd* referred to as *al-rubūbiyya* denotes the sovereign ownership, lordship, sustenance, and creative power that God holds over all creation. To uphold this element of God's unity Ibn Taymiyya states "is to acknowledge that God created all things and that there do not exist two makers of the world, equal in their attributes and agency" (ibn Taymiyya 2010, 116). *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* thus relates to God's creative acting, volition, power, and will over His creation. God as creator (*al-khāliq*) is the ultimate source of all that is: "There are no creatures on the earth, nor anything in the heavens, except that Allah is its Creator, glory be to Him. There is no Creator other than Him, nor is there a Lord besides Him" (ibn Taymiyya 1999, 107). God has ultimate power (*qudra*) over all things: "He, glory be to Him, has power over all things that exist and do not exist" (ibn Taymiyya 1999, 107). God's omnipotence is an essential property of God's *rubūbiyya* from eternity: "He has power from eternity, and shall have it for ever and

ever." (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 8:30). For Ibn Taymiyya an integral aspect of God's *rubūbiyya* concerns His divine will (*mashī'a*) and active volition (*irāda*). First, God's universal divine will is to be understood as being central to His dominion over creation: "whatever God Wills comes to pass, and whatever He does not will does not come to pass, and that whatever is in the heavens or on the earth, of movement or stillness, only occurs by the will of Allah, glory be to Him. Nothing occurs in His dominion if He does not intend it" (ibn Taymiyya 1999, 107). Second, Ibn Taymiyya marks out a distinction between God's divine will (*mashī'a*) and active volition (*irāda*), but he also further divides the latter. He refers to God's active volition in one of two ways, as either: (a) *irāda dīniyya shar'iyya*—by which he means religious/deontological, and (b) *irāda kawniyya qadariyya*—by which he means ontological/determinative (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 18:132). Regarding the first sense (a), it refers to instances of God's active volition which are tied to "God's love and approval." Ibn Taymiyya states that this aspect of God's volition is the subject of numerous verses in the Qur'ān such as, "He does not will difficulties for you (2:185), and "He wills to purify" (ibn Tamiyya 1995, 18:132). By contrast the second sense (b) refers to the "creative volition of God" (1995, 18:132). It is this aspect of God's active volition (*irāda*) which most closely resembles His divine will (*mashī'a*) and picks out a central feature of God's *rubūbiyya*, for "Every particle of the universe is the object of His will (*irāda kawniyya qadariyya*), and there is nothing there which is not its object, be it good or evil, right or wrong. This will comprehends what is not comprehended by *irāda dīniyya shar'iyya*" (1995, 18:132).

Ibn Taymiyya's traditionalist theology depicts God as one explained in terms of three categories of *tawḥīd*, and seeks to affirm the apparent reading of the Qur'ānic text. Such a reading gives us a picture of God as possessed with multiple names and attributes, and it denotes God's active engagement in time in the world. Much can be derived from this scripture-centered metaphysics of God, none more so perhaps than what it means for the relationship between God's essence and attributes, and the very nature of those attributes. Ibn Taymiyya asserted that "quiddity [of God] is identical with its reality and its existence. As the existence (*wujūd*) of a particular created being out there is identical with its essence (*dhāt*) or reality (*haqīqa*), God is all the more identical with His existence (*wujūd*) in which nothing else participates, and which is same as His quiddity that exists in itself" (ibn Taymiyya 1979, 1:29). In this passage, Ibn Taymiyya appears to affirm a doctrine of simplicity to all beings, by suggesting all it is true in all cases that the existence of a thing and the essence of a thing are really one and the same. On the face of it, that reads strikingly odd, but in fact, it is drawn out from Ibn Taymiyya's broader empiricist epistemology, and nominalist metaphysics. For he contends that,

> There is no divine Essence out there without any attributes; in fact there is not a single essence out there stripped of all attributes … there cannot be any essence which is not a essence having an attribute such as knowledge, power, etc., neither in language nor in thought … not that they are over and above the divine Self, not at all. On the contrary, the divine Self is ever qualified with those attributes which are inseparable from it. Neither are the attributes without the Essence, nor is the Essence without the attributes.
>
> (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 17:161–2)

In other words, there is no ontological distinction between the attributes and essence of any particular being instantiated in reality. In that sense, Ibn Taymiyya affirms divine simplicity, but in a radically different sense in which it is understood by what we label *classical theism*. Roughly speaking, Ibn Taymiyya argues the following then against those who seek to draw out an ontological distinction between the essence and attributes of God, and His creation:

1 The distinction between essence and attributes is merely conceptual.
2 Merely conceptual distinctions are not ontologicall distinctions.
3 So, the distinction between essence and attributes is not an ontological distinction.

Given that there is no *ontological* distinction to be had between a thing's essence and its attributes, all we have when we are considering any particular existent is the thing in question with all its attributes which are ontologically inseparable from it, without it ceasing to be. Crucially, Ibn Taymiyya's empiricism also allows him to reject metaphysical parts as being genuine parts of God in the sense of their being separate from the whole or their instantiating the whole in such a way that the essence is dependent upon them.

   For Ibn Taymiyya the notion of a "composite (*al-tarkīb*)" has a particular meaning, denoting a body (*jism*) composed of parts (*ajzā'*) where the parts were separate and subsequently joined (Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 266). For instance, the composition of medicines, foods, clothes, houses, etc., where their constituent parts were separate and then joined through a continual series of "attaching" (*rukkib*), leading to the complete composition. A composite thing may also be something that exists while its parts may be separated from it – e.g., a human being's persisting through the severing of its limbs. To describe God as "knowing," "powerful," and the like, is not to attribute composition to God. Ibn Taymiyya argues, for instance, that what we may render "intellectual parts (*al-ajzā' al-'aqliyya*)" as *aspects* or *attributes* of a thing which describe it in epistemic terms (as when humans are categorized as "rational animals"), these "parts" exist only in the mind but

not in extramental reality. In contrast, "parts" in the real sense only refers to things perceptible, i.e., material parts. As such, according to Ibn Taymiyya it is evident that God is not "composed (*murakkab*)" (ibn Tamiyya 2005, 267). The upshot of this then is that Ibn Taymiyya wants to maintain a clear distinction between attributes (*ṣifāt*) and parts (*ajzā'*).

Furthermore, he rejects the notion that because God as traditionally conceived in light of scripture would be "composite" according to the Muslim philosophers (in the sense that God's essence contains multiple attributes), this would mean that God exists through something other than His essence, i.e., that God would then be a contingent entity in virtue of subsisting through attributes. His rejection of this reasoning is grounded in the idea that it makes no sense to speak of a "part" being "other than a thing"—e.g., God's attribute's being other than His essence, when the thing in question concerns something which cannot exist without those "parts," and when they themselves cannot have any independent reality without being instantiated in some whole. So, it doesn't make sense to say, for instance, that God would have to exist through other things, i.e., through His attributes, if He was "composed" of attributes, because His attributes are necessarily concomitant to His essence (*zātihī*), and as such it's impossible for them to be really ontologically "other" in the sense that they may be separable and hence through which He may exist (ibn Tamiyya 2005, 270). Thus, ultimately God exists by His essence, which is qualified with attributes which are themselves "necessary (in) being (*wājib al-wujūd*)." God is not composed of parts, and His attributes are not separable in any sense from His essence.

As we have seen, ibn Taymiyya affirmed a multitude of attributes of God: power, will, oneness, wisdom, knowledge, and love. But he also infamously affirmed attributes spoken of in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, which come across as strikingly anthropomorphic: the hand, eyes, laughter, speech, descent, and ascent of God. In doing so, Ibn Taymiyya was charged with holding a blasphemous and heretical theology (for which he was taken to trial in the state-religious court). Ibn Taymiyya maintained that he was not a corporealist and that affirming such attributes is to be done with careful qualification, but how was this qualification made? It is done in reference to a theological principle known as *balfaka*. This principle which is shorthand for *bi'lā kayf* meaning "without how," captures the *amodal* response to God's divine attributes. That is to say, one can affirm these attributes to God without inquiring into the modality or howness (*kayfiyya*) of these attributes, and yet at the same time deny any univocal comparison between, for instance, God's hand and that of a human hand (ibn Tamiyya 1995, 6:363). Central to his affirmation of these attributes to God is his theory of language and metaphysics. For one thing, Ibn Taymiyya denied the existence of extra-mental universals.

This enabled him to strike a complete ontological distinction between God's hand and a human hand because what is shared between the meaning in each instance of the word 'hand' is not some *real* universal property of "hand-ness," but rather the common overlap (*mushtarak*) is merely conceptual, and its ontological manifestation is particular to the thing in question (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 5:83).

In the midst of these radical approaches to the conception of God in Islam, Ibn Taymiyya went further than perhaps anyone in the tradition in emphasizing the temporality of God acting, willing, speaking, and creating since eternity past (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 18:237). On the one hand, the *mutakallimūn* held that the world had a beginning in time, created *ex nihilo* by God. On the other hand, the *falāsifa* held that the world is an eternal emanation from God. Ibn Taymiyya's position comes as third alternative between the two, and seeks to maintain the createdness and total dependence of the world on God, but also to uphold the temporal dynamism of God as described in the Qur'an. Roughly, his position is that God's creative activity is eternal, and yet that which God brings about through His eternal creative activity began to exist at a point in time (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 18:228). Ibn Taymiyya argued that there is no scriptural basis for the view that God's creative activity had a beginning in the past and that there is both a scriptural and rational basis for thinking that God's creative activity is eternal (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 18:228). He asserted that to suggest God's creative activity had a beginning in time (as he alleges that the *mutakallimūn* do) would require that, in order for God to become an agent when not originally being one, some prior cause must necessitate the change in God's state. However, that would mean something external to God caused a change in Him and violate His *rubūbiyya*. Therefore, there could not have been a beginning to God's creative activity (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 18:226–7). At the same time, neither can it be acceptable from Ibn Taymiyya's point of view to say that the world is an eternal emanation flowing from God, because causal agency means that a cause precedes its effect *in time*, since things which come to be, come to be in time. Hence, he rejects the philosopher's notion of "essential/metaphysical causality." Rather, God in his perfection perpetually creates in eternal dynamic fashion. In this context then, Ibn Taymiyya marks out a distinction between on the one hand, a temporally successive infinite regress of created effects (*tasalsul al-āthār*), and, on the other, an infinite regression of efficient causes (*tasalsul al-'ilal*) (ibn Taymiyya 1986, 1:436–438). He rejects the latter as a logical impossibility, whilst affirming the former on the grounds that God is continuously acting, by His will and power.

For Ibn Taymiyya this *temporal dynamism* of God's nature and perpetual creative activity is rooted in what he takes to be a proper reading of the Qur'ānic text (ibn Taymiyya 1995, 6:222–3). It is *prima facie* evident from the Qur'ān that God has successive creative acts in time.

> *Surely We created you. Then (thumma) we formed you. Then we said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam", and they prostrated. (7:11).*

> *… He created him (Adam) from dust; then (thumma) said to him, "Be," and he was. (3:59).*

> *Perhaps God will bring about after that a [different] matter. (65:1).*

Such verses are the basis upon which Ibn Taymiyya affirms to God what he coined "voluntary attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-ikhtiyāriyya*)" (1995, 6:217). These attributes of God are specifically those that are linked to God's will; they are manifest through God willing. For Ibn Taymiyya these attributes are God are among others His speech, hearing, sight, will, love, good pleasure, mercy, and anger (1995, 6:226–7). They are said to "subsist in His essence by His will and power," and as such are both a divine attribute of action (*ṣifāt fiʿl*) and a divine attribute of essence (*ṣifāt zāt*). He argues that an act of speaking is not separate from a speaker but subsists in the essence of the one to which the speaking is attributed, so God's act of speaking—through his will and power—subsists in His essence. He adds that "speech as an attribute is a perfection (*kamāl*)," and so it is a perfection that one speaks by one's will; therefore, it is proper to attribute this to the essence of God (Ibn Taymiyya 1995, 6:219). Ibn Taymiyya holds that to think otherwise and to hold that God's attributes are timelessly eternal doesn't allow for any meaningful interaction between God and the world. Instead, God's attributes of love and anger, hearing and seeing as taught in the Qur'ān are all sufficient to demonstrate to us God's temporally sequential interaction with the world and His creation.

A crucial component of Ibn Taymiyya's traditionalist theology is also his conception of a perfect being theology, according to which the *al-ṣifāt al-ikhtiyāriyya* are integral to the view of a dynamic and perfect God. Unlike the *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* who saw God's timelessness as central to His perfection, Ibn Taymiyya rejects that as a view of a God motionless and abstract in favor of a view of God as personal and perpetually relational to the world He creates. Ibn Taymiyya argues that a perfection (*kamāl*) occurs at its proper time. For instance, he says, when God spoke to Moses God's wisdom (*hikma*) made it such that He spoke at a particular time which was the most perfect for the situation, and so only at that very existent moment in time does God act, since to act prior to the right moment would be an imperfection (1995, 6:241). So, the fact that God's voluntary attributes manifest sequentially in time is a sign of His perfection. Moreover, he argues that an essence speaking by its will is greater or more perfect than one that cannot do so, and hence we must attribute to God these attributes which allow that by His very essence, He speaks or acts by His own will and power.

This unique vision of God in the Islamic tradition sees Ibn Taymiyya being as true as he possibly can to the apparent readings of the scripture, as well as what he takes to be the honest dictates limited human reasoning. The conception of God is thus one neoclassical, in that God is temporal and predicated with proper attributes that are not identical to His essence, although they are not thought to be nonidentical either. God is affetive through His constant relationship with His creatures, whom He protects or forgives, loves or admonishes as the time permits, willing and acting through sequential moments in time.

8.4 Muslim Peripatetic Philosophy

The primary representative of the philosophical tradition within Islamic history is Abū ʿAlī Husayn Ibn Sinā or Avicenna, to whom we now turn. At the heart of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics of the God is a pivotal ontological distinction concerning the nature existence. For Ibn Sīnā, being or existence (*wujūd*) itself, taken in a sense to be the most fundamental starting point of all ontological inquiry immediately impressed upon us, can be divided into three primary categories: a) necessary (*wājib*) i.e., that which must exist by a necessity of its nature, b) contingent (*mumkin*) i.e., that which may or may not exist, and c) impossible (*mumtaniʿ*) i.e., that which by its nature necessarily could not exist (cf., Ibn Sīnā 2005, 29–30).

Drawing on this most primary ontological and metaphysical distinction concerning existence, Ibn Sīnā developed a novel argument known as the "Demonstration of the Truthful" (*burhān al-ṣiddīqīn*). This argument intends to show that there must be at least one necessary existent being (*wājib al-wujūd*). In setting out this argument, Ibn Sīnā deploys a second crucial metaphysical distinction, namely between essence/quiddity (*mahiyyā*) and existence (ibn Sīnā 2005, 30). Contingent existent things are things whose essence do not guarantee their existence; the essence of the thing in question is ontologically separable from existence. Since contingent existent things can exist or fail to exist, if they do exist then given that by the essence of its nature it does not have to exist, there must be some external cause which "preferred" its existence over its non-existence. On the other hand, a necessary existent thing is a being whose essence guarantees its existence; its essence is ontologically inseparable from its existence, and hence it does not require an external cause for its existence.

But is there such a thing as a necessary being? Ibn Sīnā's answer is yes. In order to see this he urges us to imagine the sum of all existing contingent beings. There are two possibilities: either the sum itself is a contingent being, or else it's a necessary being. If it is necessary then a necessary being exists. If it is contingent than there must be some external cause which caused it to exist. This cause again though must be either contingent or necessary (for it cannot be impossible, since impossible things

cannot exist). Yet, it cannot be contingent since then it will be a part of the whole make up of contingent beings and hence will not be an external cause of that set of contingents. Therefore, it must be a necessary being; so at least one necessary being exists (cf., Marmura 1980, 350).

The above argument is a prelude to Ibn Sīnā's philosophical theology. He goes on to demonstrate that necessary being must be unique, simple, immaterial, and it must possess intellect, power, generosity and goodness (ibn Sīnā 2005, 257–91). He provides independent arguments for each attribute. Let's sketch out his main arguments for the simplicity and uniqueness of God. He adopts the project of deriving all attributes of God rigorously since he believes that God is a necessary being and, as such, that all of His attributes must be necessary. For, if his had contingent attributes that would require some external cause or principle to account for its being, which is not possible for a being that is necessary.

First, Ibn Sīnā attempts to demonstrate that there is exactly one necessary being. As we saw in our discussion of the different trends within Islamic theology, the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) is the most fundamental attribute of God. Hence, Ibn Sīnā himself also makes it fundamental to his philosophical theology. In doing so, he uses draws on a form of *reductio ad absurdum*. Assume that there are two distinct necessary beings which we can call X and Y. Since X and Y are different beings there must be an explanation that accounts for why they are different. An explanation of this cannot be X or Y, since in that case whoever is the explanation will be the cause of the other being. But nor can the explanation lie in some external being, since this will render both X and Y dependent on it, which contradicts their being necessary. Thus, it is impossible for there to be two distinct necessary beings Ibn Sīnā 2005, 34–38).

Ibn Sīnā's also offers a second argument for God's oneness. In this argument he again assumes that there are two distinct necessary beings X and Y as the basis for his reductio argument. Yet this time we can ask what makes these two beings exist together necessarily. If we assume that the nature of X explains this distinction, then X would be the cause of Y, but this would make Y a contingent being. Yet the same also applies if we locate the explanation of X in Y. Moreover, once again we cannot have it that an external cause explains there being exactly two necessary beings, since then both will be contingent. Hence it is not possible for two necessary beings to coexist (cf., Adamson 2013, 177–179).

He also contends that this one necessary being must also be simple, i.e., non-composite. Ibn Sīnā argues for this by adopting a strategy similar to the one drawn on above. If the necessary being is made up of parts then there must be something which separates them from each other. This means that these parts must have a cause, and would therefore be contingent. But the necessary being cannot be made up of contingent parts, because that would mean that he subsists through contingents and hence wouldn't be necessary after all. Hence the necessary being must be both

one *and* simple. Significantly, due to simplicity of God, Ibn Sīnā ascribes to Him attributes only by way of negation or by way of relation (Adamson 2013, 179–181).

The necessary being must then also be immaterial, since matter is made up of parts. From immateriality Ibn Sīnā then argues that the necessary being must be pure intellect. Ibn Sīnā believes that it is matter that prevents proper intellectual apprehension. Thus, an entirely immaterial being which is always actualized apprehends without restriction. The object of this apprehension is God himself, so that God is both intellect and intellected (*'āqil wa-ma'qūl*). Yet God's knowledge is not understood in the manner of the scholars of *kalām*. Ibn Sīnā maintains that God knows all things at once only through his knowledge of his own being as the principle of their existence. He does not apprehend changeable particulars except *via* their universal form, since more proximate engagement with material particulars would compromise his changelessness. Necessary being also cannot change and move; hence it cannot be in space and time. Moreover, in his view, God cannot have contingent attributes or relations. Hence God cannot cause the universe freely; rather, it must have emanated from God necessarily. One may worry that this makes all of creation necessary, elevating it to God-like status in that respect. But for Ibn Sīnā, it is only God who is necessary *in himself*, whereas all things other than Him are made necessary through another (*wājib al-wujūd bi'ghayrihi*) viz., God (Ibn Sīnā 2005, 30–34).

Overall, Ibn Sīnā's conception of the divine is one that is forthrightly classical theistic: God is rendered wholly other through His utter metaphysical simplicity, timelessness, immutability, and impassibility.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sort to understand the primary conceptions of the divine within the Islamic tradition. As such, reference was made to the main distinct trends within the theological tradition: Muslim scholastic theology, Muslim scriptural theology, and Muslim peripatetic theology. We considered the unique treatments of the topic of God's nature with respect to His relationship to the world and space-time, as well as the relationship between His essence and attributes. The general conclusion of the chapter with respect to the particular models of God put forth by representatives of the differing schools of theology of Islam sees them as located within the camps of either classical or neoclassical theism.

Notes

1 For detailed review of Kalam cf. (Wolfson 1976).
2 For Ash'ari theology see: (Al-Ghazali 1983).
3 For mutazilite theology see: (Abd al-Jabbar 1996).

4 For Maturidi theology cf., (Maturidi 2001).
5 We take the distinction between classical and neoclassical theism to be roughly the following: classical theists affirm that God is (a) simple – without proper parts, (b) timeless – lacking temporal succession and location, (c) immutable – unchangeable both intrinsically and extrinsically, (d) impassible – is causally unaffectable; neoclassical theists are those who affirm that God is one and unique, but at least deny one of (a)–(d). Cf. Sijuwade 2021, 1–3.
6 Fideism here isn't to be understood pejoratively.

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9 Classical Theism and Jewish Conceptions of God

Samuel Lebens

Monotheism is the belief that God exists, created, and continues to sustain the world (Deists, by contrast, *deny* that God continues to sustain the world). *Classical Theism* has more to say than Monotheism. Its God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. Moreover, its God is simple, atemporally eternal, and impassable. Does Orthodox Judaism require us to believe these claims?

Judaism is not a creedal religion. If you were born a Jew, you are considered a Jew, irrespective of what you happen to believe. A gentile who *becomes* a Jew, through conversion, remains a Jew, even if he/she loses the theological beliefs that led him/her to convert. We've already arrived at one sense in which a Jew *doesn't* need to be a Classical Theist. A Jew doesn't need to believe anything to be a Jew.

Nevertheless, Jewish law recognizes the notion of an *apostate*. Is a Jew who fails to be a Classical Theist an apostate? According to the *Mishna* (Sanhedrin 10:1),[1] a Jew becomes an apostate if he/she verbally denies the doctrine of the resurrection or the divinity of the Oral Torah.[2] Menachem Kellner infers that the Rabbis are more concerned with what you *say* (verbal denial) than with what you *believe* (Kellner 2006). In fact, according to Kellner, the doctrine has almost no import in the Rabbinic worldview whatsoever. I disagree. But even so, I'd concede that the beliefs that *do* matter to the Rabbis are not particularly fine-grained. You might have to believe that the Torah (both Written and Oral) is part of the revelation of God. But crucially, what you understand by the word "God" (and, indeed, the word "revelation") is left relatively open.

Judaism rarely *legislates* belief—some deny that it ever does (see Goldschmidt 2014). According to those who think that Judaism *does* command belief, it does so sparingly, appealing only to broad and general principles, such as the 13 principles of Maimonides, or the three principles that later thinkers coalesced around (see Lebens 2020).

Classical Theism, as a more fine-grained collection of theses than Monotheism, is too fine-grained to be included among the essential principles of Judaism. If one believes, with the Orthodox Jew, that the Hebrew Bible is an authentic revelation of God, it's going to be hard to

deny that God is omnipotent,[3] omnibenevolent,[4] and omniscient.[5] But is God *simple,* impassable, atemporal? Maybe. Maybe not. Forgive the turn of phrase, but Judaism is too broad a church to allow for apostasy to turn upon such detailed scruples.

A better question: *should* Judaism, or believing Jews, embrace Classical Theism? There are, without doubt, some very important voices in the Jewish tradition who *did* endorse, and even helped to shape the history of, Classical Theism. But those traditions, I shall argue, were always in tension with other Jewish ideas that came to their fullest articulation in the Kabbalistic tradition. The most philosophically satisfying way to proceed, for the Orthodox Jew, I shall argue, is to embrace only certain *elements* of Classical Theism, while endorsing a large number of claims that the Classical Theist is bound to reject.

In the opening paragraph of this chapter, I mentioned three doctrines that the Classical Theist endorses, in addition to the claim that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. The three extra claims are that God is (1) simple, (2) atemporally eternal, and (3) impassable. If you are a Jew who accepts that the Written and Oral Torah are the product of revelation, should you accept these three extra claims? In 9.1, I explore the reasons that Jewish thinkers have had for doing just that. In 9.2, I raise some problems that emerge for those thinkers. In 9.3, I suggest some Jewish alternatives to Classical Theism, to escape the problems raised in 9.2.

9.1 Jewish Classical Theism

Classical Theism claims that God is (1) simple, (2) atemporally eternal, and (3) impassable. First, we'll look at the motivation for divine simplicity. Then we'll turn to God's putative eternity and impassibility.

9.1.1 Keeping It Simple

That God is simple could mean a number of things. It could be a mereological claim. Accordingly, we'd be saying that God isn't composed of multiple parts. There are both scriptural and philosophical grounds for God's mereological simplicity.

> **Biblical Grounds:** When Moses says, "Hear, oh Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4), he's not merely saying that there's only one God. He says that elsewhere (*e.g.,* Deuteronomy 4:35). Rather, it's plausible that, in this verse, Moses is claiming God to be mereologically simple, i.e., indivisible.

> **Philosophical Grounds:** If God were mereologically *complex*, you'd be able to ask what caused the various parts of God to

come together. Since God – *ex hypothesi* – is the first cause, and since to ask what caused the parts of God to come together is to ask for a cause that is *prior* to God, that question can make no sense. Since that question can make no sense, it follows that God must be mereologically *simple*.

But the Classical Theist attributes something more than *mereological* simplicity to God. Here are some (confusing) things that we hear Classical Theists say:

- God has no properties.[6]
- All of God's properties are one.[7]
- God's existence is identical to His essence.[8]

Notice that these claims, at least *prima facie*, conflict with one another. Moreover, the final claim is difficult to take seriously at all. Philosophers in the analytic tradition are going to think of God's essence in terms of some sort of complex property that is essentially His. If God's existence is identical to that property, does that not make God Himself a property? Properties are generally thought to be abstract, and therefore causally inert. God, by contrast, is concrete: the cause of all things. So how can God be identical to any property? It's not hard to see how these claims provoked the ire of Alvin Plantinga (1980). And yet, some historical sensitivity can help us to see an argument behind these claims, worthy of a hearing.

When Classical Theists claim that God's existence and essence are the same thing, they don't mean that God is a property. That would be to assume too much about what an essence is. To understand these historical ways of talking, one has to grasp that, in the background, these thinkers are committed to the notion that God is *conceptually* simple. By "conceptual simplicity," I mean the following:

> **CS:** *x* is conceptually simple iff *x* transcends all metaphysical categories (including matter, form, particular, and universal).

When we're told that God's essence is identical to His existence, I take it to mean that God can't be *distinguished* from His properties. This isn't because He and His properties are very alike, nor because He *is* a property, but because the entire distinction doesn't apply to God to begin with. What it means for God to be conceptually simple is that He altogether transcends the metaphysical distinction between an object and its properties.

If God is conceptually simple, then we can't really say very much at all about God. Indeed, the variable in CS occupies a place in the sentence that's grammatically reserved for a noun. Nouns refer to objects or

particulars. So, any attempt to apply the formula of CS to any actual being, including God, is always going to be self-defeating. We've arrived at the sort of paradox that captured Frege—the concept-*horse* paradox—when he conceded that, by his own lights, it wasn't possible for him to refer to concepts, even though he seemed to be doing so, even in the very act of saying that one couldn't refer to concepts.[9]

Every declarative sentence has a subject and a predicate. It seems to follow that any declarative sentence about God will predicate some property of Him. But if every attempt to distinguish God from His properties is a category mistake, then every declarative sentence about God, even our claim that God is conceptually simple, will be doomed to the same fate. They will all be category mistakes.

Maimonides has two strategies for circumnavigating this difficulty:

Strategy 1. Even if we can't truly *affirm* predicates of God, we can truly *negate* them. Since God isn't the sort of being to whom properties apply, we *can* truly say that God *isn't* ignorant, and that God *isn't* weak (see Maimonides 2000, 1:58). But, as Gersonides points out, it remains unexplained why Maimonides is less comfortable saying that God isn't wise, and that God isn't strong, since these negations, by Maimonidean lights, would also be true (Gersonides 1987–1999, 3:3, pp. 111–112).[10]

Strategy 2. We can talk about what God *does* rather than what God *is*— or more accurately, we can focus on God's causal imprint on the world. Indeed, when the Bible describes God as merciful, it is, according to Maimonides, engaging in a shorthand. It really means that God has the sort of causal imprint upon the world that people would tend to have if they were merciful (Maimonides 2000, 1:54). The problem with this strategy is that it's left something of a mystery how and why God causes the things He causes, since there can be no such things as the properties in virtue of which God has that causal profile.

Why were Jewish thinkers attracted by these counterintuitive ideas? Following Ibn Sina, Maimonides (2000, 2:4) believed that only a being that was conceptually simple could function as an explanation for the existence of our universe.[11] This belief was undergirded by an Aristotleian conception of what *calls* for explanation and what *counts* as an explanation.

According to Aristotle, whenever we are confronted with some matter taking some form, the phenomenon calls for explanation. Why does that parcel of matter take that form? For these purposes, the matter needn't be thought of as physical. Anything that serves as the subject of predication is, in that context, functioning as a matter to some form. For example: when I say that democracy is a just system of government, democracy is the matter, and *being a just system of government* is the

form. According to Aristotle, whenever matter takes a form, there is a call for explanation.

Take, for example, my table. It is matter with form. It therefore calls for an explanation, since we can ask, "Why does this matter take this form?" By way of answer, I must first distinguish the matter (i.e., the wood and the nails) from the form (i.e., its *tablehood*). This much provides me with the material and formal cause. An explanation must also provide an efficient cause, in this case: the movements and actions of a certain carpenter over a certain time. The explanation isn't complete, as far as Aristotle is concerned, until I've provided a *final* cause, which would be something like the *motive* or *goal* of the carpenter. This will tell us why the carpenter fashioned that material into that form in that way. Next, we could take the wood, or the nails, and ask for an explanation of why *those* parcels of matter have the form that *they* have (or had, before they were made into a table), and the process of explanation will begin again.

In Book VIII of his *Physics*, Aristotle appeals to God as the "unmoved mover," in terms of which the motion of the spheres can be explained. God is the efficient cause of their motion, and the desire of the spheres to come close to God is the *final* cause of their motion. But, according to Ibn Sina[12] and Maimonides (2000, 2:4), this theology actually fails to be sufficiently Aristotelian.[13] In other words: Ibn Sina and Maimonides seek to out-Aristotle Aristotle. If you have something that can be described as a *mover*, then you still have the distinction between matter and form—in this case, the *being* and its property of being a *mover*. But if God has a *form*, then we're still talking about something that calls for an explanation. If we're still talking about something that calls for an explanation, then we haven't yet reached *God*, since God is supposed to be the *ultimate explanans*.

Only something with conceptual simplicity fails to call for explanation, since only something conceptually simple transcends the distinction between matter and form. This just follows from an Aristotelian conception of explanation. The belief that God is the final explanation of the universe, coupled with a sufficiently Aristotelian conception of what explanation is, and of what *calls* for explanation, pushes us in the direction of saying that God must be conceptually simple. Explanation can only bottom out in conceptual simplicity.

There are also some non-Aristotelian routes to God's conceptual simplicity. For example:

- **Saadya Gaon** thought that God must transcend the distinction between object and property in virtue of His being the creator of both categories (Saadya 1976, 2:8, p. 111). This argument relies upon the (admittedly contentious) assumption that categories and properties are the sort of things in need of creation.

- **Hasdai Crescas** thought that God transcended the distinction between object and property because, at least regarding properties of perfection – i.e., the sort of properties we might want to attribute to God – Crescas was a resemblance nominalist. God – and not some property or other – is what serves as the paradigm that gives meaning to all predicates of perfection. On this picture, God isn't wise in virtue of holding the property of *wisdom*. Rather, what we mean, when we say that God is wise, is that He is the final being in a sequence of increasing resemblance, in a given respect – the wisdom-respect. What we mean when we say that something other than God is wise is merely that it resembles God in that same respect (Crescas 2018, pp. 108, 323).[14]

According to Maimonides, every time the Bible seeks to make a predication about God, we'll have to re-read that predication as a disguised negation, or as a truncated description of God's causal imprint on the world. These radical interpretations of the Bible are, at least, in possession of Biblical warrant. After all, according to the Bible: God's ways and thoughts are beyond us;[15] He is incomparable to *any* other being;[16] and He tends to appear to the nation amidst a cloud, as if to signify that our grasp of Him can only ever be hazy and tenuous.[17] There's also a well-known Talmudic story, much admired by Maimonides, according to which language is an irredeemably blunt tool with which to talk about God (Tractate Brachot 33b; Maimonides 2000, 1:59).

Nevertheless, we shouldn't understate how radical the view becomes. Unless you adopt the resemblance nominalism of Crescas, you're going to have to subject even God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence to a radical re-interpretation. God isn't powerful, as are other powerful beings, in virtue of having the property of *power*, nor He is knowledgeable, as are other knowledgeable beings, in virtue of holding the property of being *knowledgeable* (*cf.*, Maimonides 1:57). Instead, all of these predications—power, knowledge, and the like—are radically equivocal. You may try to soften the blow by saying that our words can have some sort of analogical application to God, but it remains something of a mystery how we can meaningfully use language analogically if the analog is something that is, in principle, beyond comprehension.[18] It's fine to trade in metaphors, but if we can have no notion of what our metaphors are metaphors for, then we won't have escaped from the clutches of a very austere theology. Isaiah wasn't exaggerating when he said that God's ways and thoughts are beyond us.

9.1.2 *Time for a Change*

As I understand it, Classical Theism isn't merely the view that the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator of the universe is

conceptually simple. It also includes the claim that God transcends both time and change. Admittedly, there is one verse in the Hebrew Bible that explicitly states that God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6). But there are 23,144 *other* verses to consider.

In the Hebrew Bible, God seems to be constantly reactive to the actions of man. The decision to flood the earth, saving only Noah, serves as a paradigm example. The God of the Bible looks to be a being who travels with us along the passage of time, interacting with His creation, and changing course where necessary. This is also how God is presented throughout early Rabbinic literature. God is even described, in the Talmud, as engaging in different activities at different points of the day (*e.g.,* Tractate Avoda Zara, 3b). So how did medieval Orthodox Jewish thinkers come to embrace the picture of a God who utterly transcends time and suffers no change or causal interaction?

It is sometimes argued that if God were perfect, He must be unchanging because every change constitutes a step away from, or a step toward, perfection. But if God were perfect, He couldn't change by taking a step *toward* perfection (since He's already there). He couldn't change by taking a step *away* from perfection because to step away from perfection is itself an imperfection, and God is—*ex hypothesi*—perfect. So, God can't change. Once it's established that God is unchanging, we must conclude that He exists beyond time. Time, after all, is the measure of change. Things that are, in principle, not subject to change are also, in principle, not subject to the passage of time.

The argument of the previous paragraph assumes that all changes are either an improvement or a deterioration. But why think that? Perhaps there are multiple ways of being perfect. A perfectly powerful being should be able to commit crimes. A perfectly *moral* being couldn't do such a thing. Perfections can conflict. In fact, perfect morality might sometimes get in the way of other (non-moral) values (Wolf 1982). So, perhaps there are a variety of equally, and maximally, good ways of being. Moreover, perhaps what it really means to be a perfect being, is to be able to choose your own perfections, from one moment to the next.[19] Worse still, the argument seems to assume from the outset that God is outside of time. If, by contrast, God were a *temporal* being, then there would be no reason whatsoever to think that change would always come at a cost. Witness William Hasker's perfect watch:

> A short while ago, it registered the time as five minutes after six o'clock, but now it registers twelve minutes after six. Clearly, this is a change in the watch. (Compare this watch with an "immutable" watch that always registers 10:37, day in and day out.) Is this a change for the better, suggesting a previous state of imperfection?

> Not at all … Is it then a change for the worse, a decline from perfection? … It is, in fact, an example of *a change that is consistent with and/or required by a constant state of excellence.*
>
> (Hasker 1994, pp. 132–133)

A perfect temporal being would *have* to change, like Hasker's watch, just in order to maintain its perfection. So, our first argument for God's being unchanging, in addition to its other flaws, was begging the question, by assuming that God was outside of time.

Why should we think that God is outside of time? Perhaps you'll say that, because God *created* time, He must be beyond it. But that's to make various assumptions about what time is. If time is the measure of change in the physical universe, then it *would* seem to follow that the creator of the physical universe must somehow transcend time. Aristotle certainly seems to have thought that time can only pass in the presence of changing physical states. But, in more recent times, Sydney Shoemaker has convinced many that we can make sense of time passing even through a completely frozen physical universe (Shoemaker 1969).[20] If time can pass without anything going on in the physical universe, then there's no reason to think that the creator of the physical universe was also the creator of time. Time might be uncreated.[21]

Perhaps you'll think that if time was uncreated, and that if God was *bound* by time, then the very existence of time becomes something of a threat to God's sovereignty. But if God is, *by nature*, a temporal being, then it's peculiar to say that God is a prisoner of time. It's absurd to complain that God is the prisoner of His own nature. That God is bound by His temporality, is no less a worry than that God is bound by His goodness, and therefore *a prisoner to it.*[22]

Certainly, if we're thinking of time as some sort of container that exists prior to God and forces itself upon God, then God's sovereignty would be undermined. But for all we know, the passage of time is nothing more than the passage of God's consciousness from moment to moment. Perhaps the very fabric of time is grounded in God, such that the passage of time is just a consequence of God's nature.

Some argue that, since God is perfect, He is never in *need* of anything. And, since He never *needs* to change, He must already be all that He ever needs to be. Consequently, He can have no merely potential powers, or potential properties. Rather, all of His powers, and all of His properties, are always actual (*cf.,* Maimonides 2000, 1:55). This renders God changeless since change is just the actualization of latent potential. God is pure act. There can be no change because there is no latent potency in God.

But, once again, this argument begs the question, tacitly assuming from the outset, without argument, that God exists beyond time. Only if

God exists beyond time would you have any reason to think that perfection entails changelessness. But if God is, by nature, a temporal being, then He *would* need to change, from moment to moment, like Hasker's perfect watch, in *virtue* of His perfection. This *need* would be no imperfection, just as God, by nature, *needs* to act morally.

The failure of these arguments to establish that God is unchanging and atemporal has given succor to Open Theism, according to which God is a temporal being. But I fear that Open Theists neglect to take seriously another argument that moved many philosophers in the Middle Ages. The argument runs as follows: if causation and change are among the *explananda* for which God serves as *explanans*, then God Himself cannot be liable to causal manipulation or change (*cf.,* Maimonides 2000, 2:4).

In other words: if God were among the things that can change and be causally reactive, then He would be one of the *explananda* rather than the *explanans*. God must therefore, by dint of His role as the ultimate explanation of the universe, be an *uncaused* causer, and an *unmoved* mover, an actor with no latent potential to be acted upon. And even this says too much. After all, God doesn't have some property in virtue of which He moves or causes things. His transcending the very distinction between matter and form is what allows Him to be the ultimate explanation. Open Theism, with its changing temporal God, cannot allow God to serve, in this way, as the ultimate *explanans*.

A possible response, on behalf of the Open Theist, proceeds as follows: God need not be the proximate explanation of every change in order to serve as the ultimate *explanans*. Instead, God creates the material world, and continues to sustain it in being. But the particular contours of the events that transpire within that world, post-creation, arise independently of God's causal activity (even if He's sustaining all of the causal agents in being). These changing events then provoke reactions from God. God, in this picture, remains the *ultimate* explanation and cause, but He is Himself liable to change.[23]

This response, I fear, is hollow. On this account, God is the ultimate explanation of the changes that transpire in the created universe, but the created universe itself is the ultimate explanation of the changes that transpire in God. That would be to place God and the created universe on the same explanatory plane, which would, in turn, undermine the sense in which God is the ultimate *explanans*.

The only way to render God the ultimate *explanans* is to say that He is unchanging. The only way for a being to be *perfect* and unchanging is for that being to be atemporal, knowing all things from His eternal present, without change. This is a strong argument, even if it forces us to reinterpret Biblical and Rabbinic presentations of God.

I hope to have given Jewish Classical Theism a fair hearing. Now for the opposition.

9.2 Reasons to Resist

9.2.1 Eat Your French Fries

In 9.1, we distinguished between two forms of simplicity: mereological and conceptual. We should also distinguish between two forms of conceptual simplicity. Maimonides and Saadya Gaon thought that God transcended the distinction between object and property in such a way that positive-predication—i.e., the attribution of a property to God—can never be literally true. As we saw, this is problematic. It renders all talk about God (including this very sentence) more or less false. This type of conceptual simplicity should be distinguished from the conceptual simplicity that Crescas endorses.

According to Crescas, God transcends the distinction between object and property, but *not* in such a way that predicates can't apply directly to Him. Crescas pulls this off by saying the following: God doesn't have multiple properties, and we can't meaningfully distinguish between God and His properties, but God is, nevertheless, what gives meaning to any number of predicates, by functioning as their paradigm exemplar (Crescas 2018, pp. 108–109, 323).

This conception of simplicity captures a sense in which God is perfect. His power, knowledge, grace, and the like, hang together so perfectly that they can't be isolated one from the other as distinct properties. They are, instead, different aspects of one perfectly integrated essence; the essence of a being who gives meaning to words like "power," "knowledge," and "grace." Let's call Crescas-style simplicity, simplicty$_C$, and Maimonides-style simplicity, simplicity$_M$. We can define these forms of simplicity as follows:

> **Simplicity$_M$:** An entity is simple$_M$ iff it transcends all metaphysical categories (including matter, form, particular, and universal).

> **Simplicity$_C$:** An entity is simple$_C$ iff it functions as the paradigm exemplar that gives meaning to all the non-relational predicates that apply to it.

It's only simplicity$_M$ that troubles me. Simplicity$_M$ is what we called conceptual simplicity in 9.1. As we saw, the reason for adopting simplicity$_M$ stems from an Aristotelian conception of explanation. But there are problems with that conception. First: it seems to assume that anything that calls for explanation *can be* explained. But perhaps there are things that are, in principle, inexplicable.

More fundamentally, perhaps there are facts that don't call for an explanation at all (even if the facts in question *do* have the structure of matter instantiating form). Dan Baras provides the following example:

Suppose you take an ordinary looking coin and toss it hundreds of times. Suppose it lands HTHTHTHTHT … (H = heads; T = tails) and continues in this pattern every single toss. Such an occurrence would no doubt call for explanation. On the other hand, if the result were a messy, insignificant sequence of H and T, the occurrence would not call for explanation.

(Baras 2020, p. 11607)

Admittedly, and as Baras documents, there are a number of different disambiguations of the phrase, "calling for explanation." But one could argue that, on any plausible disambiguation (and certainly on all of those provided by Baras), some facts *do*, and some facts *don't*, call for explanation. Relatedly, you might think that, sometimes, "that's just how it is," *is* an appropriate explanation. Disgraced comedian, Louis CK, once described how frustrating a conversation with children can be (excuse the exotic language):

They just keep coming; more questions: "Why?", "why?", "why?" … My daughter the other day, she's like, "Papa why can't we go outside?"
"Well, cuz' it's raining."
"Why?"
"Well, water's coming out of the sky!"
"Why?"
"Because it was in a cloud."
"Why?"
"Well, clouds form when there's vapor."
"Why?"
"I don't know! I don't know! That's … I don't know any more *things*. Those are all the things I know!"
"Why?"
"Cuz' I'm stupid, okay? I'm stupid!"
"Why?"
"Well, because I didn't pay attention in school, okay? I went to school, but I didn't listen in class."
"Why?"
"Cuz' I was high all the time. I smoked too much pot."
"Why?"
"Cuz' my parents gave me no guidance …"
"Why?" … This goes on for hours and hours and it gets so weird and abstract. At the end it's like, "Why?"
"Well, because some things *are* and some things are *not*."
"Why?"
"Well, because things that are *not* can't *be*."
"Why?"

"Because then nothing wouldn't *be*. You can't have f*cking nothing *isn't*; everything *is*!"
"Why?"
"Cuz', if nothing *wasn't*, there'd be f*cking all kinds of sh*t that we don't like: giant ants with top hats dancing around. There's no room for all that sh*t!"
"Why?"
"… You eat your French fries you little …"[24]

Surely at some point, the right answer to a why-question really is, "Well, because some things *are* and some things are *not*." I have to admit that, unlike the Aristotelian, I have no method for determining where and when to draw that line. But a line has to be drawn somewhere, and it sometimes seems as we've dug down as far as explanation can hope to seek, long before the Aristotelian has given up. Sometimes you ask why a particular thing has a particular form, and the right answer has to be an investigation-terminating answer, like the one that Louis CK sought to give his daughter. Wittgenstein makes the point with less humor in the *Tractatus*:

> **6.371**: At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena.

> **6.372**: So people stop short at natural laws as at something unassailable, as did the ancients at God and Fate.
> And they both are right and wrong. But the ancients were clearer, in so far as they recognized one clear terminus, whereas the modern system makes it appear as though everything were explained.
> (Wittgenstein 1961)

These words can be turned against Ibn Sina and Maimonides. They treat God like the moderns treat laws of nature. They treat God as if He explains something. But what the ancients, according to Wittgenstein, truly grasped with *their* talk of God was that God *isn't* an explanation. Or at least, not a regular explanation. He is a terminus; an investigation-terminating answer. The right point at which to offer an investigation-terminating answer is when you've come to conclude that an *explanatory* answer simply isn't possible. The existence of something so conceptually simple as to make it impossible to talk about can't possibly hope to *explain* anything. So why posit such simplicity$_M$ to begin with? Instead, explain as much as you possibly can, which may well take you all the way to the posit of a being who is necessarily existent, and (say) necessarily omnipotent. What causes God to have all of those necessary properties? At this point, it's in order to reply: "well, because those properties are essential to a being who grounds all other beings."

Why? Because that's how the notions of necessity, grounding, power, and being relate to one another. Why? "Well, *because*!" At no point am I tempted to ascend to the posit of a being so simple$_M$ that we can't actually talk about it. So, eat your French Fries and stop asking why.

Saadya Gaon also thought that God was simple$_M$, but only because he thought that God has to be the creator of properties and categories. He thought this entails that God could *have* no properties (Saadya 1976, p. 111). But (a) it's not clear that properties and abstract categories stand in need of *creation* to begin with, and (b) it might well be possible for those things to be somehow grounded in God whilst also *applying* to Him. In short: Simplicity$_M$ was a bad turn for Jewish theology to have taken. It forced us into highly revisionary re-readings of Biblical and Rabbinic literature. Its philosophical motivation was insufficiently compelling to justify such a cost.

9.2.2 Time and Time Again[25]

The notion that the God of Judaism—who reveals Himself through the Hebrew Bible—exists outside of time raises a host of problems. How can God, in His timeless eternal present, be present to Moses on Mount Sinai, and be present to Elijah on Mount Carmel, simultaneously, if the event of Moses being atop Mount Sinai isn't simultaneous with the event of Elijah being atop Mount Carmel? Simultaneity is a transitive relation. So, if God's timeless present is simultaneous with two separate events, A and B, then A and B must be simultaneous too; but the life of Moses didn't overlap at all with the life of Elijah.

Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann famously addressed these issues with their notion of ET-simultaneity—a non-transitive relation that relates temporal events to the life of an atemporal God in His own eternal present (Stump and Kretzmann 1981; 1987; 1992). Their work gave rise to a burgeoning secondary literature. I'll let readers assess that literature on their own. In the meantime, let's accept (if only for the sake of argument) that tying the life of an Eternal God to the individual moments of our temporal lives poses no insurmountable challenge for the Jewish Classical Theist. But there are other challenges in store.

If God is unchanging and impassable, then we cannot have any affect upon God. If we can't have any affect upon God, then how can He know what we're doing? For example, I just typed the words, "for example." Did that not cause God to know that Samuel Lebens typed the words "for example"? If my actions have no causal affect over God, then how could God know of any of my actions?[26]

Maimonides, like most Classical Theists, was happy to accept Aristotle's account of God as the *intellectus*, the *ens intelligens*, and the *ens intelligibile* (thought thinking itself).[27] In other words, God knows

all things, but only in virtue of knowing Himself. At this point, you could ask lots of questions. If God's knowing Himself is sufficient for His knowing that I wore blue socks today, then doesn't that imply that God's essence somehow *entails* that I would wear blue socks today? And, if that fact was entailed by the essence of God, then did I really have free will to do otherwise?[28]

At this point, Maimonides argues that we're ignoring the radical equivocation that separates predicates applied to *creatures*, and predicates applied to a simple$_M$ God. It might be true that human knowledge is *factive*, such that knowing something about the future entails that the known fact is already determined, but that doesn't tell us anything about *divine* knowledge. The word "knowledge" is equivocal (Maimonides 2000, 3:20). At this point, one might wonder whether the Maimonidean reconciliation of Divine foreknowledge and human free will is anything more than a pyrrhic victory. To secure it, Maimonides had to remove everything we know about knowledge from the word "knowledge" when applied to God (Gersonides 1987–99, Vol. II, p. 79).

Crescas was right, I think, to pour scorn upon the notion that God is His own thought, as well as being His own act of thinking. Crescas insists: what God knows is *not* identical to what God *is* (Crescas 2018, 4.13, p. 354). If God is omniscient, then He knows all intelligibles. How could all of the intelligibles be rendered *one*? That would mean that the fact that 2 + 2 = 4 is identical to the fact that London is the capital of England. And, how can this "one" intelligible be rendered somehow identical to an omniscient God, and to His act of knowledge? Rather, if God knows every particular, then He must know them severally. He cannot be identical to all of them. This is all very sensible, but how can we block the inference that God is made knowledgeable by the many things that He knows, which entails that things outside of God are contributing to His perfection, or at least, *acting* upon Him (*Ibid.*, 2.1.2, p. 124)?

Crescas responds as follows. Typically, an object is ontologically prior to human knowledge about it. God's knowledge is different. God's knowledge *confers* existence on the things that it knows (*Ibid.*, 2.1.4, p. 139). *Humans* are perfected (and acted upon) by the things that they know. That's because those things play a role in giving *rise* to human knowledge. But in the case of *divine* knowledge, the order of explanation is reversed; God's knowledge gives being to the things that He knows.[29]

In other words: an impassable God can be omniscient so long as He is the cause of all things. But that would give rise, of course, to a theological fatalism that leaves no room for libertarian free will.[30] Now, Crescas won't have minded that corollary. Crescas was a determinist and a compatibilist. But, if you want to give human beings libertarian free

will, which seems to be the implicit assumption of the Hebrew Bible, and if you want to make sense of God knowing all things, it becomes very difficult to maintain that God cannot be acted upon.

We act upon God when we cause Him to know the things we've chosen to do. This doesn't mean that God has to be in *time*. Our actions could be ET-simultaneous with God, even though they are not si-multaneous with each other, such that they are always, in His eternal present, causing Him to know them. But it *does* entail that God is, in some substantive sense of the word, *acted* upon. This, the Classical Theist can't accept. Instead, they'll have to say that God knows all things, without really meaning it, since the word "knowledge" when applied to God has been stripped of all known semantic content, or applied by an analogy even though we can have no idea what the analog is. Or, holding the meaning of "knowledge" constant, they can say that God knows all things by knowing Himself, or by causing all things, but then they'll have to give up on libertarian free will. These are big costs for the believing Jew. But the costs don't end there.

The entire Hebrew Bible is, in large part, a document of the *covenantal* relationship between a particular nation and God. Louis Newman (1991, p. 95) points to Biblical treatments of *covenant*, according to which a *covenant* – quite unlike a *contract*—only makes sense in the context of a prior *relationship*. Moreover, parties to a *contract* are not committed to anything that isn't explicitly among the *terms* of the contract. Covenantal relationships, by contrast, are more open-ended. The people commit to obey God's voice, even beyond any specific injunction written in the Pentateuch. These duties arise "not from the text of Torah, or even from the interpretations of that text, but from living in relationship with God" (*Ibid.*, p. 98).

But, is it possible to have a relationship with something impassable? Isn't the relationship bound up in the possibility of having moments of joint-attention, which amount to the possession of phenomenal states whose content is co-dependent, and causally reactive, with the state of the other?[31] God's capacity to take part in meaningful, dynamic, and interpersonal relationships seems *central* to the Bible's own presentation of the covenant at its heart. An impassable God cannot be a covenantal partner, since his phenomenal states cannot be co-dependent upon the states of others.[32]

In the context of a careful analysis of multiple books of the Bible, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel concludes that:

> the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos ... The prophet hears God's voice and feels His heart. He tries to impart the pathos of the message together with its logos.
>
> (Heschel 2001, p. 31)

But an impassable God has no passion. No emotion.[33] Perhaps God's causal imprint on the world merely manifests *as if* He stands in a covenantal relationship. Perhaps the prophets merely *impose* the language of pathos upon the logos of their prophecy, for poetic effect. But such a wholesale rereading of the central narratives of the Bible, squeezing *anything* truly personal out of the covenantal relationship, and all of the *pathos* out of the prophetic moment, is to disfigure the Biblical narrative beyond recognition. What remains of the Biblical narrative, once God's personhood has been interpreted away, will be:

> something wholly drab, trivial, and insipid. It is not even a matter of throwing out the baby with the bathwater; it is, instead, throwing out the baby and keeping the tepid bathwater, at best a bland, unappetizing potion that is neither hot nor cold and at worst a nauseating brew, fit for neither man nor beast.
>
> (Plantinga 2000, p. 42)

The doctrine that God is impassable threatens to eviscerate the central message of the Hebrew Bible.

9.3 Striking a Compromise

In the previous section we've seen reason for the Jew to jettison central planks of Classical Theism: simplicity$_M$ and impassibility. Jewish Open Theism might appear to be the natural alternative to turn to. I think that would be too hasty.

Elsewhere I've argued that the Open Theist, who believes in a personal God, living in time, can't coherently claim that God is necessarily omnipotent (Lebens 2021). God is left inherently vulnerable to disappointment if his free creatures have the ability to shape the open and unknown future in ways that God won't like. The very possibility of vulnerability, I maintain, is incompatible with necessary omnipotence.

In response, Ryan Mullins pointed out to me (in correspondence): God didn't *have* to create a universe. Accordingly, He didn't *have* to expose Himself to disappointment. True: He always carried the *potential* for disappointment, but it was up to Him whether to take any risks. I don't accept that this recovers God's necessarily omnipotence, but it *does* leave God very much in the driver's seat vis-à-vis His own potential anguish, and certainly powerful enough to live up to the Biblical descriptions of God's might.

Moreover, perhaps a perfect being *should* be vulnerable. Not to be so invested in the causes of justice that one would feel bitter disappointment when evil prevails, would be an imperfection. It would amount to an evil indifference (see Heschel 2001, p. 364; 1951, p. 244). If investment in our flourishing renders the God of Open Theism vulnerable, and if this

somewhat compromises God's omnipotence, then so much the worse for fully-fledged omnipotence—no perfect being should be invulnerable, if the price of invulnerability is *indifference*. The God of Open Theism is plenty powerful enough. The real problem with Open Theism lies elsewhere.

Open Theism, as we've already pointed out, has to abandon the claim that God is the ultimate explanation of the universe. The God of Open Theism is, of course, responsible for the creation of the universe. That's all well and good. But, according to Open Theism, we creatures, with our human freedom, are responsible for changes that occur within *God*. In that case, there's a sense in which the creator and the creation are on an explanatory par. Against most Classical Theists, I deny that the ultimate explanation of the universe has to be simple$_M$. Indeed, a simple$_M$ entity cannot explain anything since it cannot be spoken about.[34] But, against the Open Theist, it seems to me that, for reasons both philosophical and scriptural, God *does* need to dwell alone on His own explanatory plane, to function as the ultimate *explanans*. The God of Open Theism *doesn't* do that.

Finally, and as I've argued at length elsewhere, a distinctively *Jewish* theory of revelation would see the will of God animating both religious thought and practice in the community of religious Jews over time (Lebens 2020, ch. 7). Although it currently meets with some resistance among ultra-Orthodox Jews, I have argued that Jewish Orthodoxy cannot coherently escape from commitment to the claim that revelation is unfolding (Ibid.). Accordingly, to the extent that Saadya Gaon, Maimonides, and Crescas have joined the great pantheon of Rabbinic thinkers, their thought has become part of the Torah. They are not infallible, as we take only Scripture to be, but revelation nevertheless speaks through them.

Disregarding Maimonidean theology stands at odds with the belief that Maimonides was one of the most important Rabbis of his age, and therefore a vital cog in the vehicle of ongoing revelation.

The Jewish philosopher, who believes that multiple thinkers and schools have been part of an unfolding process of a revelation within the Jewish tradition, recognizes that no single link in the chain (other than Scripture) is infallible, but that each link matters. Accordingly, she will want to subject the work of those thinkers and schools to philosophical scrutiny in search of the most philosophically attractive way of finding a best fit between them. As we've seen, the God of Maimonides is impassable and atemporal. The God of the Hebrew Bible is personal, reactive, and timebound. The God of the Talmud seems to have had His own daily schedule of activities! Moreover, the God of the Talmud is an emotional and empathetic being (Harris 2017, pp. 83–84).

The question is, how to find a philosophically respectable path of best fit that honors the notion that every historical stratum of religious

Jewish thought was a conduit of revelation (even if some of the conduits were fallible)? I have two suggestions.

9.3.1 The Two Faces of a Maimonidean God

For any predication of the form "God is X," Maimonides licenses the translation into, "God has a causal impact on this world such that if a person were to have that sort of causal impact, we would say that that person is X." Strictly speaking, God isn't covenantal, loving, reactive, compassionate, merciful, or jealous. But, at various points in time, He has the causal impact that we would tend to associate with a person who was any one of those things. A cynical way to put this would be to say that the God of Maimonides is what philosophers of mind call a zombie. He presents outward to the world just like a person, but the lights are not on inside. He is, in a sense, dead behind the eyes—or, at least, ineffable behind the eyes.

Perhaps that's too cynical. The picture could be sketched in different terms. We must distinguish between the phenomenal God and the noumenal God, even if—of course—they are, numerically, the same God; the one and only God. When the Bible and the Rabbis talk about God as emotional, passable, temporal, and the like, they're not speaking falsely. They are, rather, describing God *as He appears to us*— i.e., the phenomenal profile of God. In fact, the Rabbis tend to be very careful to use qualifiers such as, "so to speak," to make it clear that they're not describing God as He really is in and of Himself with their anthropomorphisms. When the Rabbis ascribe emotional states to God, they tend to do so only to the *Shekhinah*, which may be nothing more than the phenomenal *appearance* of God on earth.

When Maimonides talks about God as impassable, atemporal, and knowing all things in virtue of knowing only Himself, he isn't *contradicting* the Rabbis. Instead, Maimonides is gesturing toward the ineffable reality that lies *beyond* the phenomenal God – i.e., God as He is in and of Himself; the noumenal God.

If we jettison the claim that God is simple$_M$, because of its weak philosophical motivation, and the paradoxical limitations that it places upon religious language, the faithful Jew might still be able to do justice to the place of Maimonides in the process of ongoing revelation. She can do so by adopting much of the remainder of his theology, and applying it, as Maimonides meant to apply it, not to the phenomena described by the Bible and the Rabbis, but to the noumena behind the phenomena.

I don't see any deep philosophical problem with this avenue. I merely report, for what it's worth, that I find it deeply uninspiring. I find it uninspiring because the cynical way of framing this theology isn't at all inaccurate. This God *is* a philosophical zombie. The relationship we have with Him is founded upon an illusion. In actual fact, He isn't the sort of

being who can have a relationship at all; He just appears *as if* He is. Accordingly, I have another suggestion.

9.3.2 *The Two Faces of a Kabbalistic God*

Rabbi Chaim Ickovits of Volozhin, in his *Nefesh HaChaim*, describes the ways in which the human being is designed so as to echo the form and structure of more supernal and more abstract worlds, that exist beyond our own. These more abstract worlds function as something like a family of nested prisms through which the light of God is refracted and ultimately revealed down here on earth. Each level of this multi-dimensional universe is, in turn, structured in ways that correspond to the limbs and sinews of the human being.

Who is God speaking to when he says, "Let us make man in our image"? The answer of the Kabbala is that God is speaking to the entire creation, whose image is somehow encoded in the physical design plan of the human being (*Nefesh HaChaim* 1:4).

God gave the human being, and because of their covenant with God, the Jewish people in particular, the power to sustain, strengthen, and polish these prism-like worlds, by fulfilling God's commandments. Indeed, each of the Torah's commandments is also correlated with a limb of the human body. By performing a commandment with her own limbs, the Jew strengthens corresponding limbs in the multi-dimensional supernal "body" through which God is made manifest in the world. Conversely, those who stand commanded by God also have the power to dimmish God's manifestation in this world by doing harm to the realms above, through the transgression of God's command. Indeed, the only reason that Nebuchadnezzar and Titus were able to destroy God's Temples in Jerusalem was, according to Rabbi Chaim, because the Jewish people, through their behavior, had damaged the supernal realms, and thereby lessened the manifestation of God down on earth (ibid.).

As we find in the 13th-Century Kabbalistic text, *Sefer Ha-Yihud*, attributed to Rabbi Shem Tov of Faro:

> For when the lower man blemishes one of his limbs, as that limb is blemished below, it is as if he cuts the corresponding supernal limb. And the meaning of this cutting is that the limb is cut, and becomes more and more contracted, and is gathered to the depths of being, called nothingness, as if that limb is missing above. For when the human form is perfect below, it brings about perfection above; [in the same manner] the impurity of the limb below causes the gathering of the image of that supernal limb into the depths of nothingness, so as to blemish the supernal form, as it is written "Because of the evil, the righteous is taken away"—taken away, literally.[35]

Pious Kabbalists recognize the legal authority of Maimonides and his ruling that it is heresy to attribute corporeality to God. Even so, there are a great many respects in which this incorporeal supernal "body" functions, very much, as if it were God's own body. Just as our body both clothes our soul but also allows our soul to be manifest to the world, so too this supernal "body" hides God in some respects but is also the vehicle that allows His light to become manifest in the world.

When our human body is in pain, and to the extent that our pain and suffering is a function of the fact that we live in a fallen world in which we and others are polluted by sin, how much more so must God be—and at this point, Rabbi Chaim is careful to add a clause that means, "so to speak"—*suffering* from the corresponding injury that must be present in the corresponding body part in the higher realms of reality?

> And when a person no longer feels his personal suffering from his torments because of his great bitterness over *His* [i.e., God's] suffering (so to speak), that very bitterness will then [function as the] scouring of his sins, and in this way, he attains atonement, and his personal torments leave him.
>
> (*Nefesh HaChaim*, 2:11)[36]

And indeed, the "pain" will then evaporate on high.

Although this picture is couched in qualifiers, such as "so to speak," the Kabbala clearly invites us to think of our own bodies as having an influence over some (albeit incorporeal) reality that functions much like a body for *God*. Moreover, each and every limb of this supernal "body," in their isomorphic correspondence to the limbs of the physical human body, and in all of the dimensions in which this body exists, is built out of ten elements called the *sefirot*. These elements represent various deeply psychological attributes of God, which are hypostatized, and become more and more independent one from the other in the lower dimensions of reality. Some of these elements are male. Some are female. Some are in tension with one another. Others are thought of as erotically united so as to produce offspring further down this great chain of being (see Schäfer 2000).

Despite the anatomical and psychological features of the unfolding manifestations of God on earth, or (more accurately) of the various created vehicles through which God's light is refracted into our reality, the Kabbala is equally clear that, beyond all of the manifestations, God as He is in His transcendence, described in Kabbalistic terminology as the Infinite (or *Ein Sof*), is just as the Classical Theists conceive of Him. The *Ein Sof* is perfect, and simple$_M$. The *Ein Sof* is unchanging, and impassable. The *Ein Sof* is beyond time and, despite all that we've just said about the *Ein Sof*, He is also beyond description!

So, like the God of Maimonides, the God of Kabbala can also be described in terms of two faces. The *Ein Sof*, on the one hand, corresponds to what we called the noumenal God. The unfolding powers and potencies that the Kabbalah refers to as the *sefirot*, and as the limbs of the supernal *anthropos* (or *Adam Kadmon*), on the other hand, are the elements of the *phenomenal* God, or perhaps vehicles through which the noumenal God manifests in the phenomenal world.

On the one hand, Kabbalists want to preserve all that Classical Theism might say about God when talking of the *Ein Sof*. On the other hand, in the wake of Rabbi Isaac Luria, and his doctrine of *tzimtzum* (i.e., contraction), Kabbalists also insist that the light of the *Ein Sof* was only able to emanate down into our region of reality through some sort of internal contraction.

Michael Wyschogrod was quick to point out: the doctrine of *tzimtzum* seems to pollute the doctrine of the *Ein Sof*. It seems to attribute, without any equivocation or analogy, an intentional action to it: an intentional contraction.

> It is difficult to resist the conclusion that *tsimtsum* Judaizes the emanation of Neoplatonism [according to which the creation is the unthinking overflow of God's abundance]. Whereas in classical Neoplatonism the process of emanation is unknown to the Absolute and is therefore in no sense an undertaking on the part of the Absolute, Judaism cannot absorb such an impersonal process at the core of its faith. Before emanation takes place, there must be a prior divine movement [viz., *tzimtzum*] to make possible the subsequent process, and this prior movement is purposive … So, against its will, and against its better judgement, the kabbalah deals with, or at least leaves a place for, the personality of Hashem [even at the level of the *Ein Sof*] …
>
> (Wyschogrod 1996, p. 98)

In other work, both alone and alongside Tyron Goldschmidt, I have argued that the doctrine of *tzimtzum,* as it was understood in the later Hassidic tradition, should be explained along the following lines.[37] Some facet of God's perfection (it might be His omnipotence, or omniscience, or omnibenevolence) gets in the way of anything being able to exist at all besides Him. Moreover, since God can't actually rein in any of His perfections (since to do so would be an imperfection), God is actually unable, *because* of His perfection, to create anything external to Himself.

What God does, therefore, is to create the *illusion* that He has reined in some of His perfections. This in turn creates the illusion of there being logical space for a creation to exist outside of God. In that space, God creates the world. But of course, since the contraction and the space that

it vacated are an illusion, so too – from God's perspective – is the world that He has created.

The doctrine isn't to be confused with acosmism. The universe *does* exist. It just turns out to be nothing more than an idea in the mind of God. Moreover, we fatally misunderstand the doctrine if we neglect to recognize that it bifurcates reality into two. There is what's true from the transcendent perspective of God. In addition to that, there is what's true relative to the illusion that God has generated (or, if you prefer to think of it this way, what's true according to the story that God is telling, or the dream that God is dreaming).

In the story that God is telling, all of the following claims are true: God has reined in some of His perfection; the creation exists outside of God; you and I are real human beings made of flesh and blood and possessed of libertarian free will. But, from the perspective of God in His *transcendence*, none of that is true. From that perspective, God is unceasingly perfect, and you and I are mere figments of His imagination. I have labeled this doctrine Hassidic Idealism (although it was also embraced by certain opponents of Hassidism, such as Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin).

I would argue that we've improved upon the two-faced Maimonidean picture sketched in 9.3.1.1. The Hassidic God still has two faces—so to speak—but neither of them is the face of a zombie! There is God in His transcendence. That God is outside of time, eternally dreaming up our universe (in all of its temporality) from His eternal present. He is impassable, atemporal, and perfect. He may even be simple$_C$ (but, as we've seen, we have good reason to steer clear of simplicity$_M$). As Wyschogrod points out, even at this level of reality, we can't really deny that God has some elements of a personality. After all, He makes a *decision* to imagine a world into being. He certainly seems to be a *mind*. On the other hand, He might still be impassable. And thus, God in His transcendence, you might think, is still not *fully* personal (depending upon how you define personhood).[38]

In addition to this layer of reality, there's God as He appears as a character in His own story. This is the very same God. Things are true of Him in the story that are not true of Him beyond it. In the story, He has the emotional life that the Bible, Rabbis, and Kabbalists attribute to Him. He doesn't just *appear* that way in the story. That's the way that He really *is*, in the story. In fact, His changing psychology, His covenantal relatability, and His passionate love for His creation are just as real, and just as ontologically fundamental, as your humanity, and your life, and the world around you. Sure, there is a *more* fundamental layer of ontology than that; an ontological layer in which an impassable and therefore (somewhat) impersonal God dwells alone. But our rung of the ontological ladder is what matters to us most of the time. On that rung of the ladder, God's emotional life is perfectly real. Maimonides cannot

say that God's emotions are as real as yours and mine. The Hassidic Idealist can.

Hassidic idealism allows the believing Jew to avoid the disfiguring re-reading of the Bible and Rabbinic literature that Classical Theism would force upon her. You might think that idealism itself constitutes its own disfiguring re-reading of the Bible—but note that this idealism itself need only be true relative to God's own layer of reality. It needn't be true relative to the layer of reality that the Bible mostly describes. At the same time as respecting the heart of the Biblical narrative, Hassidic idealism inherits from Maimonides the notion of a bifurcated theology—if not a noumenal and phenomenal God, then a transcendent and immanent God: God the author, and God the character in His own story. In this way, the Maimonidean tradition hasn't been wholly ignored.

Hassidic idealism would be well advised to ditch simplicity$_M$. Indeed, one way of parsing Wyschogrod's point is that the doctrine of *tzimtzum* couldn't be applied to the *Ein Sof* if the *Ein Sof* were truly simple$_M$. Nevertheless, the Hassidic idealist can attribute to the *Ein Sof* a great portion of the picture of Classical Theism, including simplicity$_C$, impassability, and atemporal eternity. In this way, the Hassidic Idealist can claim to have navigated a path of best fit through the often-conflicting strata of Jewish thought over time. Accordingly, the Hassidic Idealist has grounds to hope that she has been faithful to the unfolding process of revelation that began at Sinai.[39,40]

Notes

1 A foundational text of the Oral Torah, the Mishna was redacted at the beginning of the 3rd Century CE. For what is meant by "Oral Torah," see the next footnote.

2 Rabbinic Judaism is premised on the belief that, in addition to the Five Books of Moses, the revelation at Sinai was the source of various oral traditions, passed down over generations and eventually written down, for fear that they would be lost in the years of exile. Rabbinic commentaries on the Hebrew Bible, and upon earlier texts within the corpus of the Oral Torah, are also considered to belong to the Oral Torah upon their being accepted into the literary canon of Rabbinic Judaism. The "Written Torah" refers to the Pentateuch, and sometimes to the entire Hebrew Bible.

3 See, for example: Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:17, 32:27; and Job 42:2.

4 See, for example: Deuteronomy 32:4, and Psalms 100:5, 145:9, 145:17.

5 See, for example: Deuteronomy 29:29; Jeremiah 23:24; Psalms 139:12; and Job 28:24, 37:16.

6 Indeed, Maimonides argues that if you are describing a being that has *attributes*, then you cannot be describing God (Maimonides 2000, 1:60).

7 Hasdai Crescas (2018, 1.3.3, p. 109) writes, "although from our perspective [God's multiple] attributes are separate, they are one from God's. And the infinite goodness that is His essentially includes them all and renders them one on all counts."

8 In the words of Maimonides (2000, 1:57), "His existence … and essence are perfectly identical."
9 For a summary of the Fregean paradox, see Price (2016).
10 See Seymour Feldman's helpful synopsis of Gersonides's argument (Gersonides 1987–99, Vol. II, p. 79).
11 For more on Ibn Sina and his argument, which appears in his *Sharḥ Kitāb al-lām*, see McGinnis (2010; 2011).
12 See the previous footnote.
13 To be sure, Maimonides doesn't actually *present* himself as differing with Aristotle over this point. But he is.
14 Like any nominalist, Crescas might have trouble explaining what a respect of resemblance is, without reintroducing properties into the picture.
15 Isaiah 55:8–9.
16 Exodus 15:11; I Kings 8:23; and Psalms 35:10; 86:8.
17 Exodus 13:21–22; 16:10; Numbers 16:42; Leviticus 16:2; Deuteronomy 4:11; I Kings 8:10–12; and Psalms 97:2.
18 One option would be to collapse the analogical route into the suggestion of Crescas, such that "power" applies primarily to God, and secondarily to man. I'm reliably told that some people read Aquinas' doctrine of analogy in this way. But if that's the case, it doesn't strike me as analogy at all. It strikes me as a form of resemblance nominalism.
19 This possibility was suggested to me by Tyron Goldschmidt. The idea is mentioned, in passing, in our Goldschmidt and Lebens 2020.
20 As Robert Koons (in correspondence) rightly points out, Shoemaker's case is less that watertight. Shoemaker's account, for example, requires action at a temporal distance.
21 As I hope to demonstrate in a few paragraphs time, there are some costs associated with taking time to be uncreated. For example, the theist will be left wanting an explanation as to what was the cause of God's initial temporal state – if time had a beginning – or she'll be left wanting an explanation of the temporal progression of Divine states, if there *was* no beginning. For these reasons, as should become clearer later on, a theism that places God outside of time, and views time as God's creation, could be thought to have more explanatory power. Thanks to Jonathan Fuqua for discussion of this point.
22 These arguments are owed to Ryan Mullins (2014; 2016).
23 This response was put to me by an anonymous reviewer of Lebens 2021.
24 Transcribed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf17rFDjMZw, accessed on 06/10/21.
25 Some of the arguments in this sub-section overlap with arguments I develop further in Lebens 2021.
26 Eleonore Stump (2016) argues that the sort of influence an object of knowledge has over a knower needn't be a *causal* influence in Aristotle's sense of an efficient cause. But it seems to me that if God is truly going to be the explanatory ground for all phenomena, then He should be beyond any form of influence. If we influence God, even non-causally, then our actions explain what occurs in the life of God, which compromises the extent to which God is the ultimate *explanans*.
27 See Aristotle's *Metaphysics* XII, chapters 7 and 9, and Maimonides (2000, 1:68).
28 One might think that the Classical Theist has the resources to respond to these worries. Christopher Tomaczewski (2019) argues that what I'm calling simplicity$_M$ needn't entail modal collapse – it needn't make all things

necessary. The blue-sock creator could exist necessarily without it being necessary that He should have created any blue socks (so long as we use "the blue-sock creator" rigidly). Similarly, Robert Koons (2002) argues that having all thing flow from the essence of God needn't pose any challenge to our free-will. Koons would say that God's essence is only *contingently* the essence of a blue-sock creator. But how could God *know* that His essence had this contingent property by knowing *only* His essence? How could the blue socks creator *know* that He had created blue socks, if that fact is contingent and all He's able to know is His *essence*? God would have to know more than just His essence. He'd have to know how is essence is contingently related to things beyond His essence; the contingent *effects* of His essence.

29 As Robert Koons (2002) documents, Aquinas agrees: if God knows that p, it's because God wills that p, and because God's will makes it the case that p. Unlike Aquinas, Crescas was willing to accept that this rules out the possibility of human libertarian freedom – see the next footnote.

30 As Robert Koons (2002) would rightly point out at this juncture (and indeed as Robert Koons *did* point out, in correspondence, at this juncture of an earlier draft), there's no reason to think that God cannot be the cause of our *free* actions. Wasn't Tolkien the cause of Frodo's free choices? This response only works if, like me, you're willing to stratify reality into multiple levels of increasing (or decreasing) fundamentality (depending upon which way you're looking). On this account, relative to the level of reality in which Frodo acts, it *isn't* true to say that Tolkien determines Frodo's choices. It is only relative to a *different* level of reality that we can say that Tolkein determines what Frodo does. Relative to *that* level of reality, it *isn't* true to say that Frodo is a free agent. Two agents cannot both be 100% causally responsible for the same action. Koons thinks that this rule doesn't apply when one of those agents is God. But that's only true because of the massive distinction between the level of reality upon which God stands, and the level of reality upon which other agents stand – which mirrors the gap between Tolkien and Frodo. But if you're willing to stratify reality in this way, into multiple levels, Classical Theism ends up losing some of its appeal, as we'll see in §3.2.

31 Robert Koons is right to point out, in correspondence, that I'm assuming here that God's phenomenal states supervene upon His intrinsic state. "Many modern philosophers of mind," he notes, "would deny that this is true of human being (e.g., externalists about phenomenal content)." In response, I'm willing to concede that I swim against that tide. I *don't* think that phenomenal states can float freely from the intrinsic states of the minds that have them. If, like Koons, you think otherwise, you'll be able to resist this part of my argument.

32 Eleonore Stump (2016) would argue that Classical Theism can counternance inter-dependent states between man and God, so long as the dependence isn't *causal*. See footnote 26 above for a brief rebuttal of this strategy.

33 Admittedly, some Classical Theists make room for God to experience a constant sort of intellectual joy in consequence of His constant self-contemplation. But, for reasons I've already spelled out, God's emotional states cannot be *reactive* to ours (since I assume that emotional states affect the intrinsic state of a mind that has them). Moreover, someone committed to God's simplicity$_M$ can only use language that describes God as loving us, or having other emotions, including intellectual joy, in ways that are equivocal or metaphorical. But metaphors can't hope to be all that illuminating if we, in principle, can have no knowledge of what our metaphors are metaphors for! So you can *call* the God of Classical Theism an emotional being, but you

won't really know what the word "emotional" is supposed to mean in that context. I find such moves unhelpful.

34 And, as I've mentioned, for example, in the previous footnote, I do not find appeal to analogical or metaphorical predication to be a helpful way out of this problem.

35 Translated by Moshe Idel (1990, pp. 184-185).

36 My own translation.

37 Goldschmidt and Lebens 2020; Lebens 2020.

38 See Lebens 2021 for more discussion on what Divine personhood might mean.

39 You might worry that if the world in which we live is just a story, then – like in a mere story – contradictions can be true. That possibility, in turn, threatens to undermine all of classical logic. I respond to this worry in various places in Lebens 2020 (§§3.5, 4.5, and 5.2.2–5.2.3).

40 My thanks to the editors of this volume for their comments on an earlier draft, every one of which was insightful and constructive. Any errors or infelicities that remain in the paper, are my fault alone (and God's, for dreaming me up this way).

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10 Searching for the Ineffable: Classical Theism and Eastern Thought About God

Erik Baldwin and Tyler Dalton McNabb

In our 2022 volume, *Classical Theism and Buddhism: Connecting Metaphysical and Ethical Systems* (Baldwin and McNabb 2022), we argue that while Buddhism is not compatible with certain popular conceptions of theism (e.g., theistic personalism or what is also known as Neo-Classical Theism), Buddhism is compatible with what we call Classical Theism. This paper looks to extend our work. Specifically, we argue that, rightly defined, Classical Theism is compatible with various traditions from the East. In support of this thesis, we first summarize the main points from *Classical Theism and Buddhism*. Second, we move to consider both Daoist and Confucian traditions as to what extent these traditions are compatible with Classical Theism. Finally, we engage the Hindu Advaita Vedānta tradition. While we don't give a definite answer as to whether a proponent of this tradition can be a Classical Theist, we do sketch a brief framework for how one might go about arguing for this.

10.1 Classical Theism

Before we can synthesize Classical Theism with Buddhism, we will need to first discuss what we mean by both Classical Theism and Buddhism. Classical Theism is the view that God is strongly immutable, impassible, and metaphysically simple. We shall define each term in turn as we do in our work, *Classical Theism and Buddhism*.

God's immutability can be understood in at least two ways. First, to say that God is immutable one could mean that God's character does not change, that God's goodness will stay the same, and God will continue to be faithful in all of His promises. We can call this *weak* immutability. This is contrasted with what we call *strong* immutability. Roughly, following Aquinas, to say that God is immutable in the strong sense is to affirm that God is fully actual and cannot change in any respect, for God is perfect, lacking any potentiality or imperfection. Since God is fully actual, God does not move, or change, from one state to another, as creatures do. For instance, God does not begin one task and take up

another. In other words, God is a pure act (*purus actus*), performing one perfect action (or something like an action) from all eternity. Now, one might wonder how it is that God has only done one action for all eternity. According to the Bible, it surely seems that God has started and stopped doing various actions. For example, it seems like God led the Israelites out of the land of Egypt at, say, T^1, and at T^2, God rested from this action and instead raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. How can we understand the God of the Scriptures to be strongly immutable? Typically, Classical Theists will argue that while various actions of God come across as distinct from our perception, these things stem from God's one eternal, identical act.

When we say God is *impassible*, we mean that God cannot be affected by things. To be affected is to be moved or changed by another. But God doesn't change in any respect. Thus, if God doesn't change, how could we humans possibly affect God? For the Classical Theist of the stripe we have in mind, our relationship with God is a bit one-sided in that we are affected by God, but God is unaffected by us. One might object that God does have affections, for God is love, and love is an affection. However, while it is correct to say that there is love and joy in God, these are predicated "not by way of passion" but rather metaphorically.[1]

Finally, when we say that God is metaphysically simple, we mean that God lacks parts. It's typical for analytic philosophers of religion to understand God's nature as composite, in the sense that he has various essential properties, such as being omniscient or omnibenevolent. And, if being has enough of the requisite essential properties, then you have God. Assuming a constituent ontology, there is a problem with this view. Namely, if the essential properties that make up God turn out to be more fundamental than God Himself, then God depends on those properties for His existence, and God can no longer be considered to be *a se*. This would be in contradiction with the very definition of God.

Parting company with those who hold this sort of view, we understand talk of God's having this or that property (e.g., "God is just" or "God is love") as a shorthand description for saying the same thing, namely, that in God, there is no difference between God's existence and God's essence.[2] God simply is. God is not a being; rather, He is existence, or Being, itself. God is the ultimate reality. And as will be clarified later, God is not to be considered a *thing* or an *entity*. He is the source of all that can be categorized.

10.2 Buddhism

Having clarified what we mean by Classical Theism, we turn to explain what we mean by Buddhism. In our volume *Classical Theism and Buddhism*, we make clear that the Buddhism that is to be engaged is an

ecumenical and minimalist one, one that follows directly from the Four Noble Truths. Here's a way to paraphrase them:

- First Noble Truth: Life Contains Suffering
- Second Noble Truth: Suffering is Caused by Desire or Thirst for Things
- Third Noble Truth: There is a Path to End this Suffering.
- Fourth Noble Truth: The Path to End Suffering is through the Eightfold Path—right views, right thoughts or resolve (wisdom), right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort (morality), right mindfulness, and right concentration or meditation.

Trying to articulate a minimalist interpretation of Buddhism and its Four Noble Truths, Jay Garfield summarizes the core tenets of Buddhism as follows:

> Suffering (*dukkha*) or discontent is ubiquitous in the world …
> The origin of dukkha is in primal confusion about the fundamental nature of reality, and so its cure is at bottom a reorientation toward ontology and an awakening (*bodhi*) to the actual nature of existence.
>
> **All phenomena are impermanent (*anitya*), interdependent (*pratītya-samutpāda*) and have no intrinsic nature (*śūnya* …)**
>
> Fundamental confusion is to take phenomena, including preeminently oneself, to be permanent, independent and to have an essence or intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*).
>
> The elimination (*nirvāṇa*), or at least the substantial reduction of dukkha through such reorientation, is possible.
>
> An ethically appropriate orientation toward the world is characterized by the cultivation of *mudita* (an attitude of rejoicing in the welfare and goodness of others, of *mettā*) beneficence toward others, and especially of *karuṇā* (commitment to act for the welfare of sentient beings).
> (Garfield 2014, p. 2)

For the purposes of this chapter, we take the passage in **bold** to be the most important part of the summary. It is clearly the statement with the most metaphysical baggage. At the core of Buddhism are the notions of interdependence, impermanence, and emptiness (the view that things have no intrinsic nature, or *own being*).

By interdependence, we have in mind the thesis that all entities are ontologically dependent on one another. That is, nothing exists independently of anything else as a discrete substance and every thing is always in flux and dependent on some other entity for its existence. For example, if X is an entity, then its existence would depend on Y, and

Y would depend on Z, and so on. David Burton summarizes the thesis, stating, "all entities have a dependently arisen and conceptually constructed existence …" (Burton 2015, p. 36) Garfield puts the thesis as, "All events in time, all Buddhist philosophers agree, occur in dependence to prior causes and conditions, and all states of affairs cease when the cause and conditions that are necessary for their occurrence cease." (Garfield 2014, p. 27)

When Buddhist philosophers say that all things are impermanent, they mean to deny that there are things that persist or endure over time that have their own being. Roughly, things that have their own being do not undergo change, for no entities with *svabhāva* could survive even subtle change. For instance, consider the following argument, derived from Nagarjuna.[3] If there were things that persist or endure over time, they would have *svabhāva*; they would be independent, fundamental realities with essential properties. We presume that individual humans are entities that endure over time. However, essential to being a teenager is being young, and essential to being an elderly person is being old. Thus, because a youth and an elderly person have contradictory essential properties, a young man and the old man he (purportedly) becomes can't be the *same* entity. One might retort that there is some unobserved thing that endures that has *youth* at one time and then becomes *old* at a future time. But what could this fundamentally enduring thing with *svabhāva* be? It isn't the thing that we perceive (with our senses) over time, for it is constantly changing. Might this enduring thing be composed of more fundamental entities, such as atoms? Well, in that case, the atoms endure over time, not the-youth-that-becomes-the-old-man. (This argument makes use of physical properties, but we could run a similar argument that makes reference only to minds, or souls, and ideas.) The upshot is that, on this line of reasoning, the appearance that there are independent entities that exist over time isn't indicative of the way things actually are.

Lastly, we need to say a bit more about what we mean by emptiness. The argument for impermanence made heavy use of the notion that entities lack *svabhāva*, or own being. This view is in turn based on the doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda*, dependent origination. Buddha puts it, "When that does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases."[4] On this view, all things are interconnected, each depending on another in order to be what it is, and no entity exists independently of any other. According to this teaching, because things don't exist independently of other things, no thing has *svabhāva*.

Now, how can all *this* be squared away with Classical Theism? It is taken for granted these days that God is an entity or an object of some sort, but some Classical Theists take issue with that. For example, Brian Davies rejects that God could be considered inside the category of 'entity' when he states the following:

> If God accounts for the world at all … then God is (a) not something material (b) not to be thought of as belonging to a class of which there could be more than one member and (c) not something dependent for its existence on something distinct from itself … as Aquinas himself says, the claim that God is the source of the universe implies that 'God is to be thought of as existing outside of the realm of existents as a cause from which pours forth everything that exists in all its variant forms.
>
> (Davies 2009, p. 111)

David Bentley Hart, using the word "thing" as interchangeable with 'entity', agrees with Plontinus when he says that, "the divine is no particular thing or even no-thing." (Hart 2013, p. 107) Rather, agreeing with Davies, Hart states that, "as the source of all being, is, properly speaking, not himself a being …" (Hart 2013, p. 107)

   To make more progress here, we need to first ask what exactly an entity or a thing is.[5] Now, we might be pessimistic as to one being able to give an exact definition of 'entity' (or those other interchangeable terms such as thing), but we think we can offer a statement of equivalence to help clarify what an entity is:

   Entity: E is an Entity iff E can possess properties.

We are now in a position to show how Classical Theism can be consistent with Buddhism. As you might recall, the Classical Theist affirms that God is metaphysically simple. God is not made up of properties, nor is He identical to one.[6] God is not a thing or an entity; He is Being itself. Since the interdependence thesis and the impermanence theses apply only to entities, one cannot appeal to them to show that God doesn't exist. Since God isn't just another being, He is exempt. This opens up conceptual space considerably for a Buddhist to be a Classical Theist as well, and *vice-versa*.

   Now, there are other pressing questions to be answered. How would a Classical Theist understand the personal identity of human entities over time? Or perhaps, you might object that *some* philosophers don't restrict the core theses of Buddhist philosophy to entities but apply them to Being itself. Is there a plausible response to them? Can Buddhist religious experience and theistic religious experience both be seen as veridical? Space does not permit us to further discuss these points here. We do, however, tackle these questions in our *Classical Theism and Buddhism*. For now, we move on to discuss Confucianism.

10.2.1 Confucianism[7]

In "The Gods of Abraham, Isaiah, and Confucius," Kelly James Clark argues that the roots of the Confucian tradition are theistic and that

Confucius himself was a theist. He argues that the historical record, including bronze inscriptions, oracle bones, as well texts from the Zhou period, support the claim that the Ancient Chinese first accepted polytheism and then later on the existence of a personal, monotheistic deity.[8] Clark maintains that the people of the Shang Dynasty (circa 1600 to 1046 B.C.) affirmed the existence of a high God, Di or Shangdi, who ruled over a host of lesser gods. In support of taking this tradition to be theistic, Clarks points out that the adjective "shang," meaning, "highest, above, or supreme," indicates that the Shang took Shangdi to be a Celestial Supreme Ruler.[9]

The theism of the Shang was passed on to and accepted by the Zhou. In "The Numerous Officers," we find two different models of divine sovereignty. According to the first model, people and God bring the order of Heaven to earth through cooperation and Heaven establishes and preserves human rulers who remain obedient to its laws. On the second, God alone exhibits providential activity. Support for the first model is found in passages of "The Numerous Officers" that suggest dual activity:

> [W]hile Heaven exerted a great establishing influence, preserving and regulating the house of Yin, its sovereigns on their part were humbly careful not to lose the favour of God, and strove to manifest a goodness corresponding to that of Heaven.[10]

Other passages, such as the following, suggest the second model:

> I have heard the saying, "God leads men to tranquil security," but the sovereign of Xia would not move to such security, whereupon God sent down corrections, indicating his mind to him. (Jie), however, would not be warned by God, but proceeded to greater dissoluteness and sloth and excuses for himself. Then Heaven no longer regarded nor heard him, but disallowed his great appointment, and inflicted extreme punishment.[11]

Whichever model is correct, the textual and historical evidence supports the view that the Shang and the Zhou affirmed the existence of transcendent reality to which humans are morally culpable.

Of course, Confucius was a man of his culture. Confucius, then, worked from the worldview of his early Chinese counterparts. We shouldn't be surprised then that Confucius was also a theist. As Clark points out, after a failed assassination attempt on his life, Confucius (in *Analects* 7.23) endorses that Heaven is responsible for his virtue: "The Master said: 'It is Heaven itself that has endowed me with virtue. What have I to fear from the likes of Huan Tui?"[12] Clark states that Confucius' appeal to heaven "is a confession of his dependence on divine

assistance for his moral improvement and to persevere through life's tribulations."(Clark 2007, p. 49)

Elsewhere, in *Analects* 6.28, Confucius swore an oath, saying, "'If I have done anything wrong, may Heaven punish me! May Heaven punish me!'" If Heaven is simply an impersonal or natural force, how could it punish anyone? In contrast, an anthropomorphic Heavenly Supreme Emperor and an independent, authoritative moral source are capable of punishing human actions.

While most Confucian scholars would find fault with this line of argument, Clark is unphased. He maintains that non-Theistic readings of the relevant texts are flawed, based, apparently, "more on ideology than on the textual evidence." (Clark 2007, p. 56) We admit that, at least as things stand now, few contemporary Confucians exposed to Clark's line of argument would draw theistic conclusions. All the same, the textual and historical evidence is strong enough to support the view that it is epistemically possible for at least some Confucians to draw them too, particularly those who are, for one reason or another, antecedently attracted to theism. For Confucians who would accept theism as such, it is an open question whether they may go on to accept Classical Theism or Theistic Personalism. That is, there is no reason to think that Confucian theists would have some special reason to reject Classical Theism in favor of Theistic Personalism. Confucians then can be Classical Theists too!

10.2.2 Daoism[13]

Many people, especially philosophers, tend to think of Daoism as a philosophical school. But of course, Daoism has both religious and philosophical branches.

Julia Ching writes that religious Daoism finds its origin in the Heavenly Masters Sect of the 2nd century Han Dynasty.[14] Founded and led by Chang Lin, Laozi appeared in 142 C.E. to correct people's disrespect for the world; the sect established rituals and services and introduced a formal hereditary priesthood. Ching writes that religious Daoism of this sort, "[is] a salvation religion which seeks to guide its believers beyond this transitory life to a happy eternity. There is a belief in an original state of bliss, followed by a fallen state. And there is reliance on supernatural powers for help and protection." (Ching 1993, p. 103) In fact, even immortality "hides within itself a quest for transcendence." (Ching 1993, p. 113).

Regarding their belief in the supernatural, Ching writes:

> Taoists [belonging to this sect] believe in the supernatural, not only as *powers* but also as *beings*. I refer to their belief in a hierarchy of gods – including mythical figures, and many divinized human beings,

under the supremacy of the highest deity … called T'ai-yi/Taiyi (Great One).

<div align="right">(Ching 1993, p. 113)</div>

For these religious Daoists, Dao is not just an abstract force. Dao is a personal being identified with T'ai-yi/Taiyi.

Relatively recent historical and textual evidence supports the view that there is a Theistic branch of religious Daoism. In 1993, in China's Hubei Province, bamboo-slip manuscripts dating back to approximately 300 B.C.E. were discovered, including *The Taiyi Sheng Shui/Da Yi Sheng Shui,* or "The Great One Gives Birth to the Waters." This text informs us how ancient Daoist cosmologies relate to theistic beliefs. Translated by Sarah Allan, slips 1–8 read:

> The Great One produced water (*Da Yi sheng shui* 大一生水). The water, on return, assisted (*fu*) the Great One, thus forming (*cheng* 成) the sky (*tian* 天). The sky, returning, assisted the Great One, thus forming the earth (*di* 地). The sky and earth again assisted one another (1), thus forming the numinous and the luminous (*shen ming* 神明). The numinous and the luminous again assisted one another, thus forming *yin* and *yang* (陰陽). *Yin* and *yang* again assisted one another, thus forming the four seasons (*si shi* 四). The four seasons (2) again assisted one another, thus forming cold and heat (*cang ran* 倉然). Cold and heat again assisted one another, thus forming moisture and aridity (*shi zao* 濕燥). Moisture and aridity again assisted one another, formed a year (3) and that was all. Therefore, a year is that which moisture and aridity produced. Moisture and aridity are that which cold and heat produced. Cold and heat are that which the four seasons produced. The four seasons (4) are that which *yin* and *yang* produced. *Yin* and *yang* are that which the numinous and the luminous produced. The numinous and the luminous are that which the sky and earth produced. Sky and earth (5) are that which the Great One produced. For this reason, the Great One hides in (*cang* 藏) water and moves with the seasons. Circling and [beginning again, it takes itself as] (6) the mother of the myriad living things. Waning and waxing, it takes itself as the guideline of the myriad living things. It is what the sky cannot exterminate, what the earth (7) cannot bury, that which yin and yang cannot form. The gentleman who knows this is called [a sage].
>
> <div align="right">(Allan 2003, p. 261)</div>

Allan argues that the archeological and inter-textual evidence supports the claim that the bamboo-slips with the passages from *The Daodejing* should be regarded as a single work. If Allan is right, we have a reason for thinking that, "whereas modern scholarship makes a strict

distinction between *religious* and *philosophical* Daoism, such a distinction was not made in traditional China." (Allan 2003, p. 285)

Allan states that "The Great One" is a personal creator. She writes,

> The cosmogony begins with the statement that "The Great One produced water." The first character, transcribed as *tai* 太 in the *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, is actually written as *da* 大 on the bamboo slips, as noted above. *Tai (Da)* means "ancestral" as well as "great," and the epithet designates the first ancestor of a lineage, as in *taizu* 太祖, or *taiwang* 太王—the founding king's father. Thus, Tai (Da) Yi is the "Ancestral" or "Grand" One—the ultimate ancestor who was the progenitor of the sky and earth.
>
> (Allan 2003, p. 262)

The Great One was identified not only with the Dao but also with the Pole Star. (Allan 2003, p. 262) Allan writes:

> The Great One was the Pole Star—the source of the celestial river from which the sky, earth, and all else was produced—and its spirit. This spirit, at least in some traditions, was female, and she was the source of the celestial river from which everything formed.
>
> (Allan 2003, p. 283)

Now, we do want to acknowledge that there are naturalistic interpretations of these passages.[15] Nevertheless, Allan's reading of *The Taiyi Sheng Shui* provides some evidence that early Daoism really was theistic.

The arguments in this section are strong enough to show, we contend, that some people who are members of a "religious" branch of Daoism may plausibly identify the Dao with the personal creator deity T'ai-yi/Taiyi. Once again, so far as we know, Classical Theism or Theistic Personalism both appear to be live options for the Theistic Daoist.

10.3 Advaita Vedānta

Having now argued for our thesis, namely that various Eastern traditions are consistent with Classical Theism, we move to lay a framework for future exploration as it relates to what extent someone from the Advaita Vedānta tradition could endorse Classical Theism. Anyone familiar with the tradition will immediately sense that the main tension between Classical Theism and Advaita Vedānta Hinduism is with respect to what exists at the layer of ultimate reality. Victoria Harrison helpfully puts the tradition's ontology in schematic form:

Layer 1: Absolute reality
Nirguṇa Brahman, Qualityless Brahman, Brahman/Ātman.

Layer 2: Absolute reality seen through categories imposed by human thought
Saguṇa Brahman, Brahman with qualities. Creator and governor of the world and a personal god (Īśvara, or Iswara).
Layer 3: Conventional reality

(Harrison 2012, p. 58)

Starting with Layer 3, we now move to briefly discuss each layer of reality. Now, one might be tempted to discount Layer 3 as not real in any way. One might see that since Layer 1 is called 'absolute reality,' Layers 2 and 3 can be ignored. This would be a mistake. Layer 3 is real insofar as it is experienced. Humans, PlayStations, Dr. Pepper, guitars, leche flan, and so on, are found in experience. The Advaita Vedānta tradition doesn't want to downplay the existence of those things at Layer 3. Thus, even though *maya* (illusions) is the reason why there is experience of various entities, the proponent still wants to do justice to experience.

Going deeper into reality, experience leads us to God as a personal being who possesses various properties or qualities. Yet, human faculties are limited and are still affected by maya. When humans try to understand what is fundamental to reality, typically, we see through categories and personifications. While seeing God as the ultimate reality is a step forward in the right direction, we are still unable to understand reality as it is.

At the most fundamental part of reality is God. But it isn't an anthropomorphic God. It isn't a personal God who is made up of parts. Rather, it's pure consciousness, utterly devoid of qualities or properties. One might dare to call God impersonal or even beyond personal. Christopher Isherwood puts it like this: "Are there then two Gods—one the impersonal Brahman, the other the personal Iswara? No—for Brahman only appears as Iswara when viewed by the relative ignorance of maya. Iswara has the same degree of reality as maya has. God the Person is not Brahman in his ultimate nature." (Shankara 1978, p. 18) So, according to some in the Advaita Vedānta tradition, we should understand that God is impersonal.

So, if an Advaita Vedānta advocate wanted to also be considered a Classical Theist, what should she do? First, let's make clear what she has in common with the Classical Theist. Classical Theists are typically pluralists about modes of reality. That is, Classical Theists endorse that God is existence while humans exist to some lesser degree. We merely participate in existence. The Advaita Vedānta advocate can agree that existence comes in degrees and human existence is not the ultimate existence. Second, just like the Classical Theist who argues that God is identical to existence, the Advaita proponent thinks that God is identical to pure consciousness. As Sangeetha Menon puts it, "Brahman is explained as pure existence, pure consciousness and pure bliss … unlike the

positions held by other Vedānta schools, [consciousness] is not a property of Brahman but its very nature." (Menon 2022) Both would reject that God is made up of parts. God possessing properties or various distinct qualities is a helpful way to talk about God, but indeed, God is radically simple.

So where is the conflict? As Isherwood points out, Advaita Vedānta proponents prefer to talk about God as impersonal. Obviously, Classical Theists would typically dissent from talking about God in this way. Classical Theists believe that God is personal. So, there is indeed tension here. Nonetheless, there is more commonality than what one might first perceive. Among other reasons, due to the doctrine of simplicity, Classical Theists don't think that the word 'personal' applies to God in the same way as it would apply to creatures (Newman 1979, p. 113). Recall our discussion of simplicity earlier in this chapter. We said that God is metaphysically simple, so our words wouldn't map on to God in a univocal way. When we normally apply power to a creature, we don't thereby apply goodness and knowledge to the creature. This isn't the same with God. God's power just is His goodness, and His goodness just is His knowledge, and so on. Nonetheless, when we say that God has some attributes, we don't do so in an entirely equivocal sense either. Our language about God lies in the middle between univocal and equivocal language; it is analogical.

Therefore, when speaking with someone from an Eastern tradition, it might be helpful, for Classical Theists to say that God is something like personal. In the same way, perhaps there is room in the Advaita Vedānta tradition to not put God in either the 'personal' or 'impersonal' category. God, after all, is supposed to transcend all human categories. In the Classical Theist case and the Advaita Vedānta case, we could say that God is not personal or impersonal in the way we typically use these terms. He is Other.

Perhaps where the real conflict lies is with respect to what it means for God to be qualityless. Does this doctrine mean that there is no ontology to existence? Does it mean the Divine essence couldn't be characterized in any way as loving, good, and powerful? Of course, this would all be in conflict with Classical Theist doctrine. But, since all categories formed by human thought don't reflect God as He is, then perhaps whatever it means to be qualityless is consistent with whatever Classical Theists take God to be.

Finally, one other area of tension worthy to mention here relates to whether the Advaita proponent is necessarily committed to pantheism. This would be unacceptable for the Classical Theist. So, something would have to give here. There needs to be an exploration as to whether the Advaita proponent can modify her tradition so as to make herself related to God in such a way that it honors the tradition's repetition that 'I am Brahman,' while also drawing some ontological

distinction, such that she doesn't endorse pantheism. For instance, in the Thomist tradition, creatures are metaphysically dependent on God and participate in the being of God without being identified with God. In God, there is no distinction between his essence and his existence: God just *is* his existence. Creatures, in whom existence and essence are distinct, exist only because God creates and sustains them in being. More precisely, creatures exist in accord with divine ideas, or mental exemplars, in the divine mind, and, in virtue of being created, participate in the being of God to a greater or lesser extent, in accordance with their natures. For example, humans, having intellect and will, participate in the being of God to a greater degree than do rocks or trees. Note that although individual creatures *participate in* the being of God, they are not *part of* God's being. Again, creatures have no existence apart from God's creative and sustaining activity. The Thomist doctrine of participation avoids pantheism for at least two reasons: it posits that only God is such that his essence is identical to his existence and it draws a strong metaphysical distinction between Creator and creature.[16] Perhaps this account, or something suitably analogous to it, can be made by those in the Advaita Vedānta tradition. Whether this can be done in a way faithful to the Advaita Vedānta tradition remains to be seen.

10.4 Conclusion

Our brief exploration into Classical Theism in Eastern religions must come to an end. We hope that we have provided a framework for future philosophers as to how one might engage the question of whether various members of Eastern faith traditions can also be Classical Theists. Specifically, in this chapter, we gave a summary of our work, *Classical Theism and Buddhism*. In doing this we helped show how a Buddhist might also be a Classical Theist. We then argued that Confucianism and Daoism are compatible with Classical Theism, at least according to particular interpretations of these traditions. Lastly, we showed how someone from the Advaita Vedānta tradition could go about endorsing Classical Theism. We hope we have provided our reader with resources and material to contemplate whether, and to what extent, proponents of Eastern traditions can endorse Classical Theism.

Notes

1 See *Summa Contra Gentiles,* I 91, 12.
2 See Gilson 1956, pp. 29–32.
3 See Westerhoff 2009, pp. 38–40.
4 See Buddha 1995, p. 357.
5 *Entity*, *thing*, and *phenomenon* can all be read interchangeably. Burton uses 'entity' in Burton 2015, p. 36. Westerhoff uses the word 'object' in

Westerhoff 2009, p. 26. Garfield uses the word 'phenomenon' in Garfield 2014, p. 2. We should note that Garfield does at time also use the word 'thing' for the same purposes.

6 Alvin Plantinga develops the objection that divine simplicity entails that God is a property in (Plantinga 1980, p, 47). For a good response to this, see (Lamont 1997, p. 529).

7 For a much more in-depth discussion of what follows, see chapter 8 of Baldwin and McNabb 2018.

8 Clark 2005, p. 120.

9 Clark 2005, p. 120.

10 Legge, 1869, XIV.8.

11 Clark 2005, p. 129. The quote is from Legge, 1869, xiv. 5.

12 Quotes are from (Confucius 2003).

13 For a much more in-depth discussion of what follows, see chapter 8 of Baldwin and McNabb 2018.

14 Ching 1993, p. 103.

15 See, for instance, (Xing 2015), (Michael 2005), and (Lee 2010).

16 See Koterski 1992, pp. 185–196.

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Section II

Classical Theism: Problems and Applications

11 Divine Ideas and Divine Simplicity

Gregory T. Doolan

11.1 Introduction

Among the fundamental teachings of classical theism is the position that God is intelligent. Moreover, in accord with the doctrine of divine perfection, classical theism holds that God is a *perfect* intellect with perfect knowledge and, consequently, is omniscient (Leftow 1998, §6). Thus, not only does God know himself perfectly, but he also perfectly knows everything that he has created, will create, or even could create. Scholastic philosophers and theologians typically present this account of God's knowledge together with a Doctrine of Divine Ideas (DDI).[1] According to DDI, just as there are ideas in the mind of a human artisan according to which he knows and makes his works of art, so too are there ideas in the mind of God, according to which *he* knows and produces created beings. For most proponents of DDI, there is the consequent view that, in some respect, there must be a multiplicity of divine ideas to account for God's knowledge of the diverse things that he can and does create.

This last point poses a challenge for the classical theist who adopts DDI since another fundamental teaching of classical theism is that God is absolutely simple, admitting of no composition or multiplicity (Leftow 1998, §6). How, then, could DDI be compatible with the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS)? The question of reconciling DDI with DDS is a common one for Scholastic thinkers, each of whom provides an answer within the context of his own philosophical system. In what follows, I will focus on one noteworthy approach, looking at how Thomas Aquinas reconciles DDI with DDS in light of his distinctive metaphysics of *esse:* the act of existing.[2]

11.2 Historical Origins of the Doctrine of Divine Ideas (DDI)

11.2.1 Plato

The outlines of DDI as it comes to be expressed in the Scholastic period find their origins in the thought of Augustine (354–430 AD), in particular

from his short *Quaestio De Ideis,* commonly cited by Scholastics as the authoritative text on this topic. Augustine himself, however, makes clear in that work that the provenance of this doctrine can be traced back much further, noting that "Plato is said to have been the first to use the name *ideas*" (*De Ideis* §1).[3]

Plato himself discusses what he terms 'ideas' in a number of his dialogues, where he presents them as entities beyond the material, changeable sensible bodies of our perceptual experience.[4] These other entities are instead immaterial, unchanging, and intelligible, and Plato presents them as patterns, or exemplars (*paradeigmata*), of sensible things, accounting for their structure and intelligibility. This sort of immaterial entity he calls a "form" (*eidos*) or "idea" (*idea*) (Brennan 2002). Thus, in the *Republic,* we find Socrates noting of these forms that "Each of them is itself one, but because they manifest themselves everywhere in association with actions, bodies, and one another, each of them appears to be many" (*Rep*. 476a). Thus, there may be many acts of running, but only one form of Running; many dogs, but one form of Dog; many equal things, one form of Equality; etc. And in each case the many are *what* they are and have their intelligibility due to their relevant exemplifying form, or idea, in which they participate.

In short, Plato's line of reasoning here, known as the "One-Over-Many Argument," holds that the commonality of a property found in multiple items must be accounted for by a single, real, objective standard that is the very essence of that property (Balaguer 2016, §3). Sensible things are not identical with that property, or form, but merely *participate* in it and are, by contrast, in a constant state of change. For this reason, Plato presents them as in a state in between being and non-being and, hence, as merely objects of opinion between the intelligible and the unknowable (*Rep*. 479c). By contrast, he presents form as what really *is:* forms are the really real (*ta ontos onta*) and, thus, for Plato, they are beings according to the proper sense of the word (*Rep*. 490b). And, since whatever *is* is intelligible, he concludes that only form is properly speaking intelligible (*Rep*. 477a).

Following this One-Over-Many line of reasoning in the *Republic*, Plato ultimately concludes to the existence of a first principle that is the cause of all form, which is itself *beyond* form. Since the multiplicity of forms share in the common property of goodness, we are told, none of them *is* goodness itself. Thus, there must be a first principle that Plato at times indeed calls the form of the Good, but at other times makes clear is not a form because of its transcendence. As Socrates observes, "not only do the objects of knowledge [i.e., forms] owe their being known to the Good, but their being is also due to it, although the Good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power" (*Rep*. 509b).[5] And since the Good is beyond form and being, likewise is it beyond intelligibility.

If we follow this account of form in the central books of the *Republic* (V–VII), and in dialogues like the *Phaedo* or the *Phaedrus* that also discuss form, DDI does not appear to be part of Plato's metaphysical thought. Granted, he originates the philosophical term 'idea', but as he presents forms in these dialogues, they are subsisting entities rather than ideas within the mind of God. Still, later in the *Republic* Socrates considers the production of a bed. We are told that although a craftsman makes a bed, he cannot produce the very form of Bed. Instead, that form is produced by "the god": some sort of divine craftsman (*Rep.* 597a–d).[6] Not much more is said on this point, and there are questions about how literally to take Plato's language of "the god" producing the forms. But in the *Timaeus* Plato expands on this notion of a divine craftsman, or demiurge (*demiourgos*).[7] There, he presents a god that is the craftsman of the cosmos—a being that is pure intellect who gives order to the chaos of matter by "looking to" an eternal, intelligible paradigm, i.e., the forms (*Tim.* 27a). This language suggests that for Plato, forms are neither made by the demiurge nor even located in the mind of this being. Instead, a face-value reading of the *Timaeus* suggests that the origin of the cosmos results from the interaction of three principles that are distinct from each other: matter, the demiurge, and the separately subsisting ideas to which the demiurge looks to pattern the cosmos (Boland 1996, pp. 21–22)[8]. Is this god of the *Timaeus* the Good of the *Republic?* Plato does not explicitly tell us, but presumably not if we recall that the demiurge is a pure intellect whereas Plato's Good transcends all being, intelligibility, and intellect (Perl 2014, 58–60).

11.2.2 Plotinus

By the time of middle Platonism (1st c. BC – 2nd c. AD), a step is made toward DDI when the Platonic ideas begin to be explicitly located in a divine mind, generally one presented as inferior to the first principle (Boland 1996, pp. 22–23).[9] Albinus (2nd c. AD), however, saw no problem in identifying the ideas with the thoughts of God himself (*Dida.* IX–X). He presents us with the Aristotelian notion of a God who is a "thinking of thinking" (*noeses noeseos*): a God that Aristotle presents in *Metaphysics* XII as pure intellect and in whom the activity and object of thought are identical (*Met.* 1072b19–25). Going beyond Aristotle's account, Albinus identifies this very activity of thinking with the Platonic ideas (*Dida.* X).

It is with Plotinus (205–270 AD), the father of Neoplatonism, that we begin to see a clear and systematic presentation of the Platonic ideas as located in a divine mind. Plotinus, however, does not locate them in his first principle, or hypostasis, which he calls the One. The reason is that the One, as first, must be pure unity and, hence, entirely simple and

without need. Like Plato's Good, the One transcends being, intelligibility, and intellect. For this reason, Plotinus refuses to admit either thoughts or intellect in the One, going so far as to say that it does not have knowledge even of itself (*Enn.* III.9.9; V.6.6). Instead, thought is found at the level of Plotinus's second hypostasis, *Nous* (Intellect), which not only thinks but is thought itself.

Although Plotinus rejects Aristotle's critique of the Platonic Ideas, he follows in the now established tradition of adopting the Aristotelian notion of a divine being that is a thinking of thinking (*Enn.* V.9.5). Plotinus grants that this being, *Nous,* is simple in that what it thinks is itself; still, he maintains that even this sort of thought entails a distinction between thinking and the object of thought. Hence, we are told, *Nous* is marked by multiplicity and cannot, as Aristotle claims, be the first principle (*Enn.* V.6.1). It is in *Nous,* therefore, which is subordinate to the One, that he locates the Platonic ideas. More precisely, he *identifies* those ideas with *Nous* (*Enn.* V.9.5).

With Plotinus, then, we find a clear recognition of the tension between what will become DDI and the DDS. If DDI, as it comes to be understood in classical theism, entails the possession of a multiplicity of ideas in the mind of the first principle, God, then it appears to be at odds with DDS. Hence, Plotinus's refusal to adopt DDI, placing the Platonic ideas instead in the second hypostasis of *Nous*.

11.2.3 Augustine

The writings of Plotinus, along with his student Porphyry, likely provided Augustine with his principal exposure to Plato's thought (Boland 1996, p. 37). Augustine's own adoption of DDI in particular was significantly influenced by Plotinus and yet differed in significant ways from Plotinus's account of both the ideas and *Nous*. In his *De Ideis,* Augustine observes that what Plato had first called 'ideas' have been called by many names: in Greek, *logoi*; in Latin, 'forms' (*formae*), 'species' (*species*), and 'reasons' (*rationes*) (*De Ideis* §2). Augustine himself prefers to employ the Latin term *ratio* (pl. *rationes*) when speaking of ideas. He agrees with the (Neo)Platonic tradition that they are eternal, unchanging forms of things existing in a divine mind, but he insists that the ideas exist nowhere but in the mind of God himself, who creates a human from a different *ratio* than he does a horse (*De Ideis* 81). According to Augustine, it would be sacrilegious to hold that God looks outside of himself to find the pattern by which he creates (*De Ideis* §2). Moreover, for the Christian Augustine, it is unacceptable to subordinate this intellect to a higher principle, in the manner that Plotinus subordinates *Nous* to the One. Instead, he recasts *Nous* as the Second Person of the Trinity: the Word of God, Who is consubstantial with the Father and, hence, absolutely simple (Boland 1996, p. 67). Thus, for Augustine, the

divine ideas that are in the mind of God are more precisely in the *Word* of God, since the Word is God's wisdom (*De Gen.* II.8).

Employing language reminiscent of Plato's *demiurge,* Augustine describes the Word both as being like a craftsman (*quomodo artifex*) (*Tr. in Ioa.* II.10) as well as being the divine art that contains all things (*Tr. in Ioan.* I.17). The Word of God is thus the *exemplar* of all things. Since the Second Person of the Trinity is consubstantial with the Father, Augustine's account implies that the divine essence itself is the exemplar by which all things are made. Still, even if we find in Augustine something of a philosophical account for reconciling DDI with DDS, it is nevertheless an account presented "in words that reflect a theology deeply rooted in the Christian dogma of the Word of God" (Kondoleon 1970, p. 188).

As I have noted above (§1.1), Augustine's thought on the divine ideas and his work *De Ideis* come to be the authoritative source for the Scholastics who would later adopt DDI. With that said, even though they will accept his Trinitarian theology, we find Scholastic thinkers like Aquinas attempting to go beyond Augustine to offer a distinctly philosophical approach to reconciling DDI with DDS.

11.3 Background on DDI in Aquinas

11.3.1 What is an "idea" for Aquinas?

From the time of his earliest writings (*Sent.* I.36.2 [1252–56]), Aquinas addresses the topic of divine ideas, arguing that just as there are ideas in the mind of the human artisan, so too are there ideas in the mind of God (*Sent.* I.36.2.1 co.)[10] Aquinas sees these divine ideas as epistemological and metaphysical principles for God's knowledge and production of created beings. And he returns to this topic in each of his other major systematic works (SCG I.53–54; ST I.15.1–3) as well as most thoroughly in his *Disputed Questions on Truth* (*De ver.* 3.1–8), always reaffirming the same fundamental views about the divine ideas. The comparative analogy that Aquinas offers in these texts between the artisan and God is a helpful starting point for our consideration of this topic, but only to the degree that we first understand the terms that it entails as well as the type of analogy that Aquinas is employing.

Colloquially, in English, the term 'idea' is commonly used as a synonym for 'concept'. For philosophers, however, it is a term of art. Moreover, the meaning and referent of the term 'idea' differ for different philosophers: for example, what Plato considers to be an idea is very different from what a Locke or a Kant thinks. Aquinas's own use of the term is much closer to the English colloquial sense, signifying a concept. To be more precise, it signifies a distinctive kind of concept, one that is productive. Thus, Aquinas would term the artisan's

concept of a watch that he intends to make an "idea," whereas the same person's concept of a natural object such as a tree or a dog, which he cannot produce, would not be termed an 'idea' by Aquinas. Considering in the *De veritate* the essential account (*ratio*), or definition, of an idea, Aquinas tells us that "it is [1] a form [2] that something imitates [3] because of the intention of an agent [4] who predetermines the end for himself" (*De ver.* 3.1 co.).[11]

If we parse out the four elements of this definition, we find that Aquinas focuses on the causal role of ideas in an artisan's production of things, rather than emphasizing their epistemological role. This is not to say that he denies that ideas are principles of knowledge. Elsewhere, Aquinas acknowledges the dual role of these sorts of concepts with the example of the idea of a house: in the mind of the builder, it is indeed something that is understood, but it is also a form in the likeness of which the artisan forms a house in matter (ST I.15.2 co.). With this example, along with the first two elements of the *De veritate* definition of 'idea', we see Aquinas presenting an idea as a sort of formal cause, but not in the manner of an Aristotelian intrinsic form. Rather, he makes it clear that an idea is a form that is extrinsic to its effect. This is not to say that he views it as a subsistent entity as Plato does. Instead, Aquinas is insistent that an idea is always located in the mind of an intellectual agent. And it exercises its extrinsic formal causality in the manner of an exemplar, or pattern, that something imitates (*De ver.* 3.1 co.).

The last two elements of Aquinas's *De veritate* definition indicate that the exemplar causality of an idea occurs only in concert with efficient and final causality. If we follow the definition's third element ("the intention of an agent"), we find that the idea of a house in the mind of the artisan cannot, on its own, exemplify a house any more than a blueprint can. Instead, the artisan, or agent, possessed of the idea must act in the order of efficient causality to bring about that effect in its own likeness. In sum, the causality of an exemplar is a caused causality, dependent upon an efficient cause (*De ver.* 3.1 co.).

Finally, the fourth element of this definition ("who predetermines the end for himself") indicates the role of final causality at work in the exemplarism of an idea. Aquinas's definition, and the expanded text in which it appears, clarifies that his concern in accounting for the causality of an idea as such is not to explain its role as an end motivating the agent, but rather as providing the artisan's effect with *its* end. Although natural agents indeed act for an end, Aquinas explains, they do not determine their own ends or the ends of their effects. He asks us to consider, as a comparative analogy, the flight of an arrow. The arrow, by its action, tends toward the end of the target, but it does not determine that end. Instead, an intellectual agent, the archer, predetermines that end for it (*De ver.* 3.1 co.). Similarly, when a natural agent such as Fido the dog generates Rover, Fido is acting for an end, but since he is not an

intellectual agent, he does not determine the end of either his action or his effect. Instead, he simply acts according to his nature. By contrast, when the engineer Marc Raibert of Boston Dynamics invented the robodog Spot, as an intellectual agent he determined not only the end of his own actions but also the end of his effect. Without this latter sort of intending of the end, Aquinas tells us, there is no exemplarism of an idea (Doolan 2008, pp. 28–32).

In sum, Aquinas considers an idea to be a productive concept in the mind of an agent according to which the agent forms his effect, thereby giving it its end. And, again, Aquinas maintains that following this sense of the term 'idea', just as there are ideas in the mind of a human artisan, so too there must be ideas in the mind of God. As helpful as this comparative analogy may be, it can also potentially be misleading, suggesting to the reader that perhaps Aquinas intends it as a mere metaphorical model to help us get some purchase on divine cognition. It is indeed true that comparative analogies are frequently offered as such models and that they also often form the basis for metaphorical language. Aquinas himself gives the example of the comparison of sight with understanding: as sight is to the eye, he explains, so understanding is to the mind. Hence, the term 'sight' can be used to speak of the act of the intellect (*De ver.* 2.11). But Aquinas cautions that the mind does not *literally* see, because sight is properly a bodily act. Instead, the comparative analogy allows us to transfer the term 'sight' to speak of the immaterial act of understanding in a metaphorical way (*De ver.* 2.9 ad 3).

We might wonder, then, whether Aquinas's comparison between ideas in the mind of the artisan and those in God is likewise a mere model, such that the term 'idea' is said only metaphorically when speaking of God's knowledge. If that were the case, then the discussion of a multiplicity of ideas would likewise be metaphorical, avoiding any conflict with DDS. But the solution is not as simple as that because, in fact, Aquinas wishes to assert that according to some sense of the word 'idea', literally speaking, there are ideas in the mind of God and a multiplicity of them. To begin to see why, it is important to clarify the relevant sort of analogy at work for Aquinas when he speaks of ideas in the mind of God.

11.3.2 The Analogy from Human Art

In *De veritate* 2.11, Aquinas examines how the term 'knowledge' (*scientia*) is predicated of both God and creature. There, he observes that the term is predicated of both neither univocally, nor simply equivocally, but analogically. As he puts it, 'knowledge' is predicated of both creature and God according to a proportion. Aquinas then identifies two sorts of proportional comparisons that are the basis of two types of analogy. According to the first sort, which he calls "analogy of proportion," there

is an agreement between two items inasmuch one is related to the other. For example, the number 4 is proportioned to 2 as its double. The second sort of analogy, which Aquinas calls "analogy of proportionality," entails the relation of one proportion to another proportion. For example, the number 6 has something in common with 4 inasmuch as 6 is the double of 3 just as 4 is the double of 2 (*De ver.* 2.11).

Going beyond the examples of arithmetic proportions, Aquinas shows how proportional comparisons have bearing for analogical predication. As regards analogy of proportion (also known as "analogy of attribution"), Aquinas notes that something is said analogically of two items when one thing is said with reference to another. To illustrate, he gives Aristotle's classic example from *Metaphysics* IV.2 of the term 'healthy' as predicated of an animal but also of its urine since the animal's urine has a relation to the health of the animal as a sign of it. And Aquinas explains that it is according to analogy of proportion, or attribution, that the term 'being' is predicated of both substance and accident (*De ver.* 2.11).

As regards analogy of proportionality, Aquinas gives the example noted above (§2.1) regarding sight as said of both the act of the eye and the act of the intellect. We can present this proportionality according to the following four-term comparative analogy:

sight	:	eye	::	understanding	:	mind
A		B		C		D

In the comparison of these two proportions (*proportiones*), we acknowledge that understanding is like sight inasmuch as it is a cognitive operation, and so by transference, we can speak of the mind's understanding as a sort of "seeing" (*De ver.* 2.11). But, again, Aquinas is clear that the act of the mind is called "sight" improperly and, hence, only metaphorically (*De ver.* 2.9 ad 3).[12]

At first blush, the comparative analogy between human art and divine knowledge might appear to entail the same sort of proportionality. But if we look more closely at the proportion in that comparison, we notice a different structure with the comparison of terms:

ideas	:	human artisan	::	ideas	:	God
A_1		B		A_2		C

When the proportions are presented in this way, we see that this comparative analogy entails only three terms, unlike the four-term proportional comparison between sight and understanding. The reason is that in this analogy from art, there is on both sides of the comparison a

repetition of the term 'idea'. Now, one might wonder if perhaps the term 'idea' labeled as "A$_2$" in this presentation in fact already presupposes a metaphorical transference of term A$_1$, thereby disguising some other, more fundamental non-metaphorical term that should in fact be the one labeled as "C." To see why this is not the case, we need to consider the basis of the similarity between the terms A$_1$ and A$_2$ in this comparison and why "idea" taken as A$_2$ is not metaphorical for Aquinas.

With metaphorical language, Aquinas explains, the transferred term does not indicate a likeness as regards the proper nature, or *ratio*, of the thing whose name is transferred. For example, if the name 'lion' is said of God, it is not because the proper nature of a lion as such shares a likeness with God's nature. Instead, if God is called by the name 'lion', it is because of a likeness that some *property* of a lion has to him (*De pot.* 7.2 co.). By contrast, when names are predicated of both creature and God according to the analogy of attribution, there is a more fundamental similarity in terms of the proper *ratio* of the term, albeit with reference back to the primary instance, as in the case of 'healthy' said primarily of the animal and secondarily of the urine with reference back to the health of the animal.

As regards the term 'idea', Aquinas is clear that the *ratio* of the term as predicated of both the human artisan and God signifies the same thing, namely, what was noted above: *a form that something imitates because of the intention of an agent who predetermines the end for himself*. Thus, the analogy from art that at first glance appears to be an instance of analogy of proportionality in fact disguises what for Aquinas is a more fundamental analogy of proportion, presupposing a referential likeness of *ratio* (account) between A$_1$ and A$_2$.[13]

Considering the role of the analogy of attribution in divine naming, Aquinas makes clear that absolute affirmative names such as 'good', 'wise', and, we may add, 'idea' are said of both creature and God in a literal way (*proprie*) and not metaphorically (ST I.13.3). And he explains that such names are said of both "inasmuch as there is some order of the creature to God as to [its] principle and cause, in which there preexist in an excelling way the perfections of all things" (ST I.13.5 co.). As said of God, these names are taken from perfections found in creatures, and so in the order of application (*impositio*) they are first said of created beings; nevertheless, Aquinas clarifies that as regards what these names *signify*, they are said primarily of God, "because such perfections flow from God into creatures" (ST I.13.6 co.). In sum, when Aquinas asserts that God has ideas, he not only means this in a literal way, but he is indicating that God has ideas according to the primary sense of the term 'idea' as regards its signification.

Still, merely to assert that there are ideas in the mind of God is not to prove the point, and Aquinas recognizes as much. Thus, in each of his major treatments of the divine ideas, we find him going beyond this

initial comparative analogy between the artisan and God to offer arguments to prove the existence and multiplicity of divine ideas.

11.3.3 *Arguments for the Existence and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas*

Although the heritage of Aquinas's DDI has its roots in the thought of Plato and the Neoplatonic tradition, the doctrine is nevertheless tempered by his Aristotelianism. One noteworthy difference between Plato and Aquinas on the topic that we have already seen (§1.1) is that, for Plato, the ideas are subsistent entities whereas for Aquinas (§2.1) they are instead located in the mind of God. Indeed, following Aristotle, Aquinas is critical of Plato's presentation of the forms as subsistent universals: universals *as* universal exist only in the mind, since whatever exists in reality, outside of the mind, is singular. Aquinas sees Plato as making the fundamental error of attributing to form the same mode of existing (*modus essendi*) as the mode of understanding (*modus intelligendi*) that it has in the human intellect. Following Aristotle, Aquinas holds that in reality, form is individuated in singular things, e.g., the form of *dog* in this dog Fido and that dog Rover. Only in the mind is form abstracted from individual, material things and universalized according to our mode of understanding. According to Aquinas, Plato mistakenly attributes this *modus intelligendi* to the *modus essendi* of forms, concluding that the universals of our understanding exist as subsisting entities (*In Met.* I.10.158). Hence, in Aquinas's estimation, Plato's One-Over-Many argument for the existence of Ideas is fundamentally a *via abstractionis:* a mistaken effort to show that abstract, universal concepts must correspond to entities that are themselves abstract and universal (Henle 1956, p. 384).

Aquinas thus sympathetically presents Aristotle's critique of the Platonic *via abstractionis* when commenting on *Metaphysics* I. Nevertheless, after he does so, he goes beyond the text to add, "we should note that even though that argument does away with the separate exemplars postulated by Plato, it still does not do away with the fact that *God's knowledge* is the exemplar of all things" (*In Met.* I.15.233). If we turn to *Metaphysics* XII to see what Aristotle himself says about God, a face-value reading of the text presents a first cause of motion that is intelligent and self-aware as a "thinking of thinking," but Aristotle gives no indication how (or even whether) God has knowledge of anything other than himself, since his knowledge could not be actualized by anything *but* himself (*Met.* 1074b15–1075a10). Commenting on this passage, however, Aquinas again goes beyond the text to add that, even though God's intellect is not perfected by anything other than himself, "nevertheless, it does not follow that all other things are not known by him, for in understanding himself, he understands all other things" (*In Met.* XII.11.2614–15). In this way, Aquinas

presents Aristotle's God as aware of the world, even going so far as to say, elsewhere, that "Aristotle held that in God there are ideas (*rationes*) of all things" (*In Ioa.* 1.2).

The historical Aristotle, however, does not have a DDI, and so he does not offer any arguments for the existence of divine ideas from which Aquinas can draw. Nevertheless, Aquinas's arguments are still inspired by Aristotelian metaphysical principles rather than by the Platonic *via abstractionis*. All of these arguments, which presuppose the existence of God, are aimed at showing that God has proper knowledge of all things other than himself, i.e., knowledge of distinct things in their distinctness (SCG I.54). I have cataloged these arguments elsewhere, grouping them into three fundamental types, which I will present here only in outline (Doolan 2008, 49–64). One sort of argument reasons from the teleology of non-intelligent natural objects, which, Aquinas argues, ultimately requires an intelligence to direct them to their end. Since God directs all things to their proper ends, he must have proper knowledge of them and, hence, ideas (e.g., *In Met.* I.15.233). A second line of argument that he offers reasons in light of the Principle of Similitude: since every agent makes something like itself (*omne agens agit sibi simile*), all of God's effects must be pre-contained within him and according to his mode of being, which is an intellectual mode. So, they must be pre-contained in him in an intellectual way, namely as ideas (e.g., *De ver.* 2.3 co.). The third sort of argument reasons from God's self-knowledge: since God knows himself perfectly, he knows his power and causality perfectly and, hence, perfectly knows everything to which that power and causality extends. Thus, Aquinas concludes, he must have proper knowledge, or ideas, of all things (e.g., ST I.14.5 co.).

Aquinas is insistent that to reject DDI is to deny that God has proper knowledge of his effects, resulting in one of two absurdities: either everything in nature would be the result of chance, or else everything would proceed from God from a necessity of his nature. Both situations, however, are problematic given various other philosophical commitments of Aquinas's (*De ver.* 3.1 co.). And it is precisely to avoid such errors, he concludes, that "Augustine says that God makes a human and a horse by a different *ratio* and says that there is a multiplicity of *rationes* of things in the divine mind. In this respect," Aquinas strikingly adds, "Plato's opinion positing ideas (*ideas*) is saved …" (SCG I.54.13–14).

All of the aforementioned arguments for the existence of divine ideas proceed in the same manner as Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God, namely, as what the Scholastics termed *quia* demonstrations, reasoning from effect to cause.[14] Such argumentation, he explains, does provide us with the certitude of scientific knowledge (*scientia*), but it is a knowledge merely of the fact of the matter, unlike with *propter quid* demonstrations that reason from cause to effect, thereby also revealing the *why* and the *how*. (see ST I.2.2 co.). In short, as *quia* demonstrations,

Aquinas's arguments for the existence of divine ideas merely establish the fact of their existence but not how there can be a multiplicity of them without compromising God's simplicity. To answer this *how* question, we must turn to additional arguments that Aquinas offers to resolve this paradox.

11.4 Aquinas's Reconciliation of DDI with DDS

11.4.1 God's Knowledge of his Essence as Imitable

Aquinas's standard investigation of the divine ideas provides a consideration of the following questions: (1) Are there ideas in God? (2) Is there a multiplicity of ideas in God? (3) Are there ideas for everything that God knows? (*Sent.* I.36.2.1–3; *De ver.* 3.1–2 & 4–8; ST I.15.1–3). We have already seen his answer to the first of these questions. His answer to the last of them amounts to a consideration of the sort of items for which God has distinct ideas, e.g., of genera, species, accidents, and individuals (both actual and possible) (Doolan 2008, 123–43). Aquinas is clear that, given the technical sense of 'idea' that he employs, God does not have an idea of himself. This, of course, does not mean that Aquinas thinks that God does not know himself. To the contrary. Whatever God knows—whether himself or other things—he knows through knowing his own essence. And that essence, Aquinas explains, is the productive principle (*principium operativum*) of everything other than God himself. Since an idea, properly speaking, belongs to productive knowledge, the sort of knowledge God has of himself should not, therefore, be termed an 'idea' (ST I.15.1 ad 2).

In this explanation, we see Aquinas following the by now well-established tradition of holding that God knows things other than himself precisely through knowing himself. The fact that God is intelligent, Aquinas argues, follows from his immaterial mode of being, since understanding is the act of an immaterial being. And, as a perfect being, his knowledge must be perfect (ST I.14.1 co.). Since God is pure actuality, his intellect, act of knowing, and proper object of knowledge must be identical; if they were not, there would be potentiality in him. Hence, Aquinas concludes, God perfectly knows himself through himself (ST I.14.2–4). And in knowing himself perfectly, he knows all that he makes or could make because whatever he makes is made in the likeness of his essence.

Developing this last point in the context of the consideration of divine ideas, Aquinas explains that in a way God's very essence is the idea of things. We might think that this observation should argue against affirming a multiplicity of ideas, but Aquinas is quick to add that God's essence is not the idea of things inasmuch as it is the divine essence but, rather, inasmuch as it is *known*—meaning inasmuch as it is known by

God. As he explains, although created things imitate the divine essence, they do not do so perfectly. Thus, God does not have an idea of a given effect simply insofar as he knows his essence but, rather, insofar as he knows that effect with a *proportion to* his essence, along with knowing the degree to which that effect falls short of perfectly imitating it (*De ver*. 3.2 co.).

Continuing on, Aquinas explains that different things imitate God's essence in different ways. For example, Socrates imitates it in a human way and Fido in a dog way (even more precisely Socrates imitates it in a Socrates way and Fido in a Fido way). Each does so in its own way because the existence (*esse*) of any given created thing is distinct from that of another. Since there are these different proportions of things to the divine essence, therefore, Aquinas concludes, there must be a multiplicity of divine ideas (*De ver*. 3.2 co.). Thus, even though there is only one first form that all things imitate, viz., the divine essence, God's consideration of that essence simply as it is in itself is not what constitutes a divine idea; again, they are constituted in his considering his essence according to the different proportions it has in relation to his effects. Thus, Aquinas tells us, God "discovers (*adinvenit*), if I may speak that way, diverse modes of imitation of it, in which consists the multiplicity of ideas" (*De ver*. 3.2 ad 6). We see, then, that Aquinas's account of the multiplicity of ideas cannot be considered apart from his metaphysics of *esse* as the act of existing. Insofar as created beings imitate God's essence, they both resemble the infinite act of being that is the divine essence *and* fall short of it. And God, in knowing his essence as pure subsisting *esse* (*esse subsistens*), knows all these modes of existing (*modi essendi*) that are imitations of him, along with their shortcomings (Doolan 2008, 106–10).

Still, this account of God's knowledge as just presented may seem to suggest that he knows *through*, or by means of, a multiplicity of ideas—a position clearly at odds with DDS (*De ver*. 3.2 obj. 9). In reply to this concern, Aquinas considers again the *ratio,* or account, of what an idea is, noting that it does not have the *ratio* of *that by which* (*quo*) something is first understood but, rather, as *that which is understood* (*intellectum*) existing in the intellect. Aquinas clarifies that God indeed understands many relations—many ways in which things are proportioned to the likeness of his essence—but he nevertheless understands that multiplicity through the unity of his essence. Thus, his understanding is one and not many (*De ver*. 3.2 ad 9). Aquinas's answer here relies upon a distinction he draws in his theory of knowledge between what he terms the "principle of understanding" (*principium intelligendi*) and the "terminus of understanding" (*terminus intelligendi*). To understand the relevance of this epistemological distinction for resolving the apparent tension between DDI and DDS, it will help to consider Aquinas's account of the mechanics of human knowledge and concept formation.

11.4.2 *Principle and Terminus of Knowledge in God*

According to Aquinas, natural human knowledge begins with sensation, which is the act of a bodily organ. Consequently, sensory knowledge is only of individual material things (e.g., knowledge of *this* dog, Fido; *that* cat, Felix). By contrast, intellectual knowledge of the same material things is abstract and universal (e.g., knowledge of *dog* and *cat*) (ST I.85.1 co.). Abstract, universal knowledge therefore cannot be caused in us by a sensory power, so Aquinas attributes that knowledge to an immaterial power of the soul called the "agent intellect" (*intellectus agens*), which abstracts from the phantasms of our imaginative power forms that the Scholastics term "intelligible species" (*species intelligibiles*) (ST I.85.1 ad 4).[15] Not to be confused with the species that are logical classifications, these species are forms that actualize the intellect (SCG I.53.3). Aquinas is careful to note that they are not *what* (*quod*) the intellect understands but rather are the medium *by which* (*quo*) it understands. For example, in acquiring the intelligible species of *dog,* what the intellect knows is not the form existing within itself but rather, by means of that species, it knows the nature of dogs as it is in the world. And the intelligible species enables us to do so, he maintains, precisely because it is the likeness of the thing that we know (ST I.85.1 co. & ad 1).

Aquinas is clear, moreover, that the intelligible species just described is not the same thing as a concept.[16] It is here that we find him drawing the distinction between the *principium intelligendi* and *terminus intelligendi*. Inasmuch as an intelligible species actualizes the intellect and is the *quo* by which we know an extramental thing, its role is as a principle of understanding. Formed by this species, and through the act of understanding, the intellect next forms an intention (*intentio*) of the understood thing. This understood intention—which Aquinas tells us is the *ratio* (account) signified by a definition—is the terminus of the act of understanding. And it is this intention that he terms a 'concept' (SCG I.53.3–4). Aquinas is clear, therefore, that a concept is distinct not only from the extramental thing of which it is the likeness but from the intelligible species and the act of understanding as well. And he adds that, because an intellectual conception is expressed through a spoken word, it can also properly be called a 'word' (*De pot.* 8.1).[17]

Aquinas explains that a concept, like the intelligible species from which it originates, is a medium between the intellect and the extramental thing that it knows: it is a *quo* by which the intellect knows the thing. For example, by means of the concept *human* the intellect knows Socrates to be what he is, a rational animal. In this respect, a concept is self-effacing, presenting the world to the knower. But, Aquinas explains, unlike an intelligible species, a concept can also be the *quod* that is understood (*De ver.* 4.2 ad 3). Reflecting upon itself, the intellect can

consider the very concept *human as* a concept, understanding it as a logical species to which Socrates belongs and as itself belonging to the genus *animal* (*De pot.* 7.6 co.).

This last distinction is particularly important to note for Aquinas's treatment of ideas. Considering human art, he notes that "the idea of a work of art is in the mind of the artisan as *what* is understood (*quod intelligitur*) and *not* as the species *by which* it is understood (*qua intelligitur*), which is [instead] a form that makes the intellect to be in act. For the form of a house in the mind of the builder is something understood by him, in the likeness of which he forms the house in matter" (ST I.15.2 co.). We should recall at this point that for Aquinas, an idea according to the proper sense of the term is a productive concept, unlike our concepts of natural objects, which belong to speculative knowledge (see §2.1). Whereas the latter sort of concept is measured by the object that is known (e.g., the concept of *dog* by the form of an extramental dog such as Fido), an artisan's idea instead measures his extramental effect: the house that he makes is a house only inasmuch as it conforms to his idea (ST I.21.2 co.).

Thus, with artistic knowledge, we find an inversion regarding the relation between knower and known as found with knowledge of natural objects. With the latter sort of knowledge, the concept of *dog* really relates the knower to the extramental knowable thing (Fido), but that knowable thing is not really related to the knower. It is only by a consideration of the intellect that the knowable object is considered as the term of the relation; hence, the knowable thing (Fido) is said to be related to the knower "according to reason" (*secundum rationem*) (ST I.13.7 co.). But with artistic knowledge it is the knowable object, e.g., the house, that is really related to the artisan and the idea in his mind, whereas the artisan and his idea are related to that corresponding work of art only by a relation of reason.

Aquinas resolves the tension between DDI and DDS by factoring in aspects of all of the foregoing distinctions regarding human knowledge, showing the relevant analogs in the divine. As discussed above, this comparison is according to the analogy of attribution and, hence, is not in Aquinas's view a mere metaphorical model (§2.2). Thus, he tells us that God knows by means of an intelligible species (SCG I.46). With that said, this intelligible species is present in him according to his simple mode of being, in accord with DDS. Aquinas concludes, therefore, that in God the species by which (*quo*) he knows whatever he knows is identical with his very essence. Hence, it is also identical with his intellect and his act of understanding (SCG I.46). And since the *principium intelligendi* of God's knowledge is his very essence, the primary and *per se* object of his knowledge must be himself (SCG I.48).

As we have seen, however, Aquinas affirms that God also knows things other than himself and that he does so precisely in knowing

himself, namely, in knowing his essence as imitable to varying degrees (§3.1). Expressing this position in terms of his philosophy of knowledge, Aquinas notes that, whereas in God there is only a single intelligible species *by which* (*quo*) he knows, there nevertheless can be a multiplicity in him as regards *what* (*quod*) he knows without compromising the divine simplicity. To put this in other terms, in accord with God's simplicity there can be only one *principle* actualizing his understanding, but it is nevertheless possible for there to be many *termini* of his understanding: many "objects" that he knows through a single knowing (*De ver.* 3.2 ad 9).

Here we again see the parallel between the *quo* and *quod* of the artisan's knowledge and God's: for both knowers, an idea is not a principle of knowing but *that which is known*. Still, this parallel comes with a noteworthy difference. Whereas Aquinas presents the artisan's ideas as concepts, he does not do so as regards the *divine* ideas. The reason is that in God there can be only a single conception, which is the Word of God (SCG I.53.5). On this point, Aquinas clearly expresses a concern following revealed theology to affirm the unicity of the Second Person of the Trinity.[18] But there is a philosophical concern as well, namely, to again acknowledge that the multiplicity of ideas must be present in God according to his simple mode of being. Since a concept, properly speaking, proceeds from the intellect, it is really distinct from it (*Sent.* I.15.1.1 co.; *De pot.* 9.5 co.). The Word of God is indeed really distinct from the Father as something relative (*res relativa*), although identical with the divine essence (ST I.28.3 co.). By contrast, the divine ideas within God are not really distinct in *any* respect, whether from each other or from the divine essence.[19]

To show how there is a multiplicity of divine ideas without there being a multiplicity of really distinct concepts in God, Aquinas provides us with a thought experiment. He asks us to consider what would occur if a human artisan were able to produce a work of art in the likeness of his very intellect: in that case, the artisan's very intellect would be an idea. But not inasmuch as it is an intellect, Aquinas clarifies; rather, it would be an idea inasmuch as the artisan *understood* his intellect to be the likeness of what he makes. Aquinas contends that this is how God knows things other than himself. In a way, then, there is a single idea of all things: the divine essence. But, as we have seen (§3.1), the divine essence is not the idea of things simply because it is the divine essence. Rather, it is an idea inasmuch as God considers his intellect in relation to the creatures that he makes, according to the varying degrees that they imitate its likeness. Since there is a diversity of proportional relations that created things have to the divine essence, Aquinas concludes, there must be a multiplicity of ideas in God (*De ver.* 3.2 co.).

From all of the foregoing, it is clear that this multiplicity is not viewed by Aquinas as a real multiplicity of things or forms. Such a position

would be at odds with DDS. Instead, Aquinas is clear, the divine ideas are multiple according to reason alone (*secundum rationem*) (*De ver*. 3.2 ad 3). Still, if that is the case, the question might well be raised again whether DDI is a mere metaphorical model: is this multiplicity simply according to *our* reason, according to *our* way of understanding God? To see why Aquinas contends that it is not, we should conclude with a consideration of what he precisely means when he says that the divine ideas are multiple *secundum rationem*.

11.4.3 A Multiplicity Secundum Rationem

It has been well noted that for the Scholastics, the word *ratio* is one of the most slippery of Latin terms (Pasnau 2011, p. 233). This fact is well exemplified in Aquinas's use of the term when discussing the divine ideas. Following Augustine, he tells us that the term *ratio* can be used as another name for 'idea' (*De ver*. 3.3 co.).[20] As we have seen, Aquinas also speaks of the *ratio* of *idea* (§2.1) when identifying what precisely an idea is. And, as we have also just seen, he speaks of the divine ideas as distinct and multiple according to *ratio*. In another context, Aquinas himself acknowledges the slipperiness of this term, noting that *ratio* can be taken in different ways (*Sent*. I.33.1 ad 3). Sometimes, he explains, it names something that is in the one who is reasoning, whether that is the act of reasoning or the power from which that act proceeds. Other times, however, it is the name of an intention (*intentio*); taken in this way, the term *ratio* signifies the definition of a thing.[21] And he notes that it is commonly true of all intentions that, even though they are only in the mind, they still have something corresponding to them in reality (*in re*), which is some nature to which the intellect attributes the intention. We might give as an example of this sense of the term *ratio,* the *ratio* of *human* (rational animal), which is attributed to humans such as Socrates, you, or me because of our nature.[22]

Following these distinctions, I would argue that we can draw the following conclusions about Aquinas's terminology when discussing the divine ideas. When he speaks of the *ratio* of *idea*, he does so in the second respect just identified, namely, insofar as there is a definition, or account, of what an idea is. And when he calls an idea by the name *ratio*, he is again doing so following this second respect insofar as an idea is the formal likeness of the nature of something in reality that can itself be defined. It is for this reason that Aquinas follows Augustine in saying that "there is a different idea, or *ratio,* by which a human and a horse are created" (*Sent*. I.36.2.2 co.). By contrast, when Aquinas says that these divine ideas differ from each other and are multiple *secundum rationem,* he is speaking according to the first sense of the term *ratio* noted above, namely, taken as something in the one reasoning, namely, as an act of reason that considers the multiple ideas distinctly from each other.

But whose act of reason is identifying this distinction and multiplicity? We have seen Aquinas say that the divine ideas are multiplied according to their different relations to things (*De ver.* 3.2 ad 7). Still, since God is not ordered to creatures, Aquinas acknowledges that "the relation that is between God and creature is not in God according to reality (*secundum rem*)," adding that "nevertheless, it is in God according to our understanding (*intellectum*)." Taken on its own, this observation certainly lends itself to the reading that it is merely our own minds positing a multiplicity of divine ideas as a helpful model for talking about God's knowledge. But after making this observation, Aquinas is quick to add that "and [this relation] can similarly be *in him* according to *his own* intellect, namely insofar as he understands the relation of things to his essence. And, so, these relations are in God as understood by him" (*De ver.* 3.2 ad 8). In other words, just as *we* understand that a creature can imitate God in many different ways, so too does God understand this (*De pot.* 3.16 ad 14).[23]

It is important to note that, for Aquinas, to say that these multiple relations are in God "only" *secundum rationem* is not to dismiss them as a fiction. As he explains, sometimes a difference according to reason is not reduced to any diversity within a real thing (as in this case with God); nevertheless, it can still be reduced to the *truth* of the thing (*veritas rei*), which is in itself understandable (*intelligibilis*) in different ways (as in the case of God's imitability). Thus, although the multiplicity of relations in God is not *really* in him, this multiplicity is nevertheless *truly* understood by him. And, for Aquinas, it is precisely because relations can be in a knower *secundum rationem* "that we can affirm a multiplicity of ideas in God; hence, this position is not at odds with his maximal unity or simplicity" (*De ver.* 3.2 ad 3).

Notes

1 The initialization of 'DDI' in this chapter is not to be confused with the Doctrine of Divine Immutability, which is also commonly abbreviated as 'DDI.' On the Scholastic period and its dating, see (Noone 2003). As with dating the medieval period itself, the dating of Scholasticism admits of variation among scholars. In this essay, I follow the convention of treating this period from the time of the twelfth century and Peter Abelard to the period just prior to the Protestant Reformation.

2 For a study of DDI accounts up to the time of Aquinas, see (Boland 1996). For a study of DDI accounts during the Scholastic period from the time of St. Bonaventure up through William of Ockham, see (Vater 2022).

3 Augustine adds his personal view, however, that whereas Plato may have originated the name 'ideas', the doctrine Plato espoused must have predated him, "For it is not likely either that there were no wise men before Plato or that they did not understand those things which, as was said, Plato termed *ideas*" (Augustine 1977, p. 79).

4 On Plato's varying treatment of Forms, or Ideas, in his early, middle, and late dialogues, see (Brennan 2002; Kraut 2022). On the question of whether Plato changes his mind about Forms, see (Kraut 2022).

5 In the Grube translation of the *Republic,* which I am quoting, here, the term 'good' is in all lowercase. I have taken the liberty of capitalizing the initial letter 'G' in this quotation to highlight the role of the Good for Plato as a real causal principle.

6 This God is also briefly alluded to in *Republic* VII, 530a as "the craftsman of the heavens."

7 Plato also mentions or discusses this divine craftsman in the *Sophist* (265c–266d), *Statesman* (269c–273e), and *Philebus* (26e–27b, 28d–30e). For a consideration of these various presentations of the demiurge, see (Mohr 1985; Perl 2014, pp. 61–62).

8 As Boland notes, this is the generally accepted view among scholars (Boland 1996, p. 21). With that said, a strong interpretative argument has been made by Eric Pearl that in the *Timaeus* Plato is implicitly identifying the ideas with the demiurge and that the demiurge is in fact patterning the cosmos after himself (Perl, 2014, pp. 63–65). For an overview of the extradeical and intredeical readings of the ideas by various philosophers from the time of antiquity up to Descartes and Spinoza, see (Wolfson, 1961).

9 The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c. 13 BC – c. 47 AD) locates the Platonic Ideas in the Logos, a principle subordinate to the first principle, God. With that said, at times he identifies God's own powers as ideas (Boland 1996, pp. 28–33).

10 In dating Aquinas's works, I will follow (Torrell 2015).

11 All translations of Aquinas are my own.

12 This sort of analogical predication that is the basis of metaphor is what Cardinal Cajetan will later term 'improper proportionality'. For an overview of Cajetan's theory of analogy, see (Ashworth and D'Ettore 2021, §8).

13 Here, I am following Bernard Montagne's reading of Aquinas's doctrine of analogy. To make matters complicated, in *De veritate* 2.11 Aquinas in fact holds that divine naming entails analogy of proportionality (which Cajetan will later term "proper proportionality" in contrast to the metaphorical language of improper proportionality). As Montagnes shows, however, in works both prior and subsequent to the *De veritate,* Aquinas holds that the relevant sort of analogical naming of the divine is analogy of attribution (Montagnes 2004). As I read Aquinas, although analogy of attribution is prior in the order of nature, any such analogy can be recast as a proportionality and is sometimes presented first that way according to the pedagogical order. For a contrasting view defending proper proportionality in Aquinas, see (Long 2011; Hochschild 2013).

14 Even those arguments for the divine ideas that reason *aprioristically* from one divine attribute to another are fundamentally *quia* demonstrations inasmuch as, philosophically, they presuppose for Aquinas prior *quia* demonstrations, ultimately resting on his *quia* arguments for the existence of God.

15 For an overview of the medieval theory of the intelligible species, see (Panacio 2010, 346–50).

16 For an overview of the medieval theory of the concept, see (Panacio 2010, 350–52).

17 What he elsewhere terms the "word of the mind" (*verbum mentis*) (e.g., *Sent.* I.11.1.1 ad 4) and also the "inner word" (*verbum interius*) (e.g., ST I.107.1 co.).

18 Aquinas is clear that the Triune nature of God is an article of faith and cannot be proven philosophically. In response to the claim that natural reason can prove the generation of the Second Person of the Trinity as the conceived Word following from God's intelligence, Aquinas notes that "in God the knower and known are the same; therefore, it does not necessarily follow that we must identify in him some concept that is really distinct from him as it is in us" (*De Trin.* 1.4. ad 6).

19 Nor are they distinct from, or proper to, any one of the Persons, although they are "appropriated" to the Son of God (ST I.32.1 ad 1; Doolan 2008, pp. 118–20).

20 "As Augustine says, according to the proper meaning of the name, we call an idea 'form'; but if we focus on the thing itself, an idea is the *ratio* or the likeness of a thing" (*De ver.* 3.3 co.).

21 Regarding this second sense of '*ratio*', Aquinas notes that it is also another name for a logical argument.

22 Aquinas indicates that even a second intentional *ratio* such as *genus* can be attributed to something in reality in this respect: although *genus* is not in an animal such as a donkey, the nature of *animal* to which this *ratio* is attributed is itself in a donkey, and in this respect the intention of *genus* is attributed by the intellect in a way to something in reality (*Sent.* I.33.1 ad 3). As he puts it in another text, second intentional notions such as *genus* do not have an immediate foundation in reality, but they do have a remote foundation. And he makes clear that the term *ratio* is itself such a term and can, by extension, be said of the nature of a thing (*Sent.* I.2.1.3).

23 See also *Sent.* I.36.2.2 ad 2: "Although there are relations of God to creature, they are really founded in the creature. Still, according to reason and intellect, they are also in God; but, I say, not only [according to] the human intellect but also the angelic and the divine. And, therefore, even though creatures have not existed from eternity, nevertheless from eternity the divine intellect has been understanding its own essence in the diverse ways [that it is] imitable by creatures."

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12 How the Absolutely Simple Creator Escapes a Modal Collapse

Christopher Tomaszewski

12.1 Introduction

The doctrine of Divine simplicity has been the subject of recently renewed interest and vigorous defense by those attracted to classical views of the Divine nature.[1] (Barrett 2017, Brower 2008, Cohoe 2017, Cohoe 2020, Crisp 2019, Dolezal 2011, Dolezal 2017, Duby 2016, Grant 2004, Levering 2017, Long 2019, Minich and Kamel 2019, O'Connor 1999, Rogers 1996, Rogers 2020, Stump 2016, Stump and Kretzmann 1985) But it has also faced serious criticism in the form of claims that it is both intrinsically incoherent and incompatible with other commitments of classical theism, some of which might be thought to be ultimately more fundamental to classical theism than the doctrine of Divine simplicity (DDS) itself. In this paper, I wish to focus on one specific claim of incompatibility that has been leveled against the DDS, namely the claim that it is incompatible with the classical and ancient Christian doctrine that God created freely, and not out of any necessity whatsoever.[2] A number of philosophers and theologians have pressed this objection against the DDS (Moreland and Craig 2003: 525, Mullins 2013, Leftow 2015 and Mullins 2016: 137–43), and recently I (Tomaszewski 2019) made a reply to the effect that one simple and straightforward way of formalizing this objection in fact an invalid argument. While I stand by everything I said in that first paper about that simple argument, in this chapter my primary goal is to show that an important intuition connected to the invalid simple argument attacked in that first paper is nevertheless plausible and can be used to construct a more powerful, valid argument against the DDS. I then go on to show, however, that this argument, if successful, can be adapted to create a modal collapse for virtually *all* theists, not just those who accept the DDS. I conclude by showing that the new argument can be rejected as unsound if we also reject the principle that the effects of the Divine creative act are causally determined by that act considered as really identical (in the Thomistic sense of "really identical") to the Divine essence.[3]

But before going to defend the DDS against the charge of modal collapse, it is important briefly to rebut a common motivation among contemporary philosophers and analytic theologians for attacking the DDS: namely, that the doctrine (and all the alleged problems that come with it) are an effect of an alleged unfortunate influence of Hellenistic philosophy on post-Nicene and especially medieval Christianity (see Boyd 2017: 670 for a recent example of this complaint). Part of this accusation is that the doctrine of absolute Divine simplicity demanded by Saint Anselm, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and others in the Scholastic tradition is simply not Biblical and was unknown to the early Fathers of Church, even if they did hold a more modest doctrine of Divine simplicity that ruled out only material or integral parts in the Divine Essence. But this is blatantly contradicted by the very robust doctrines of Divine simplicity taught by early Fathers such as Saint Hilary of Poitiers:

> God, Who is Life, is not a Being built up of various and lifeless portions; He is Power, and not compact of feeble elements, Light, intermingled with no shades of darkness, Spirit, that can harmonise with no incongruities. All that is within Him is One; what is Spirit is Light and Power and Life, and what is Life is Light and Power and Spirit. He Who says, I am, and I change not (Malachi 3:6), can suffer neither change in detail nor transformation in kind. For these attributes, which I have named, are not attached to different portions of Him, but meet and unite, entirely and perfectly, in the whole being of the living God.
>
> (Hilary 1994)

Here, already in the mid-4th century, even before Saint Augustine, is a very robust DDS that not only identifies many of the Divine attributes in precisely the way that opponents of the doctrine think is absurd but also importantly insists that *all* that is within Him is one. It is true, of course, that Saint Thomas Aquinas found in his metaphysics two new things (*i.e.* essence and existence) that in God must be one, but this represents a progression in *fundamental metaphysics*, not in the DDS itself, which was left formally the same from Saint Hilary to Saint Thomas in its declaration that all within God is one. This is probably why Saint Thomas himself quotes this passage from Saint Hilary in the most important article (i.e., article 7) of question 3 of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiæ*, claiming that Saint Hilary "touches" his own argument for excluding all composition whatsoever in God in saying (in the different translation of the *Summa*): "God, Who is strength, is not made up of things that are weak; nor is He Who is light, composed of things that are dim." (*ST* I.3.7, *respondeo*)

But even in the ante-Nicene period, Saint Irenæus taught in his *Against Heresies*:

> But if [heretics] had known the Scriptures, and been taught by the truth, they would have known, beyond doubt, that God is not as men are; and that His thoughts are not like the thoughts of men. (Isaiah 55:8) For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions which operate among men. He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to Himself, since He is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light, and the whole source of all that is good—even as the religious and pious are wont to speak concerning God.
>
> (Irenæus 2007)

Of course, Saint Irenæus is only two generations removed from Saint John the Evangelist, and yet we still find in his work the core of the DDS: that God is "simple, uncompounded Being" who is wholly identical to His attributes. These two quotations alone ought to put to rest any claims that the DDS is not to be found in the doctrine of the early Church Fathers. Let's move on to the problem of modal collapse.

12.2 Simply Invalid

Simple arguments from modal collapse typically employ two immediate premises: one stating the necessary existence of God or some Divine attribute, and another stating the identity of God or that Divine attribute with something that is at least *prima facie* contingent, such as God's act of creation or the God's knowledge *that P*, where P is any contingently true proposition.

One very straightforward way of characterizing the argument from modal collapse against the DDS by attending to the identification by the DDS of God with His act of creation is like so:

S1   Necessarily, God exists.
S2   God is identical to God's act of creation.
S3   Necessarily, God's act of creation exists.

I'll call this "the simple argument."[4] Proponents of the DDS are certainly committed to (S1) and (S2) but want to reject (S3), since (S3) together with the very plausible premise that necessarily, if God's act of creation exists, then a creation exists, entails the necessary existence of a creation.[5] So this argument had better be invalid if the DDS is to escape the conclusion.

It is worth noting here that the old Thomistic distinction between absolute necessity and suppositional necessity[6] won't help with the simple argument, for the whole point of the argument is that if God's act of creation is identical to God, then it is as absolutely necessary as He is, and not necessary merely by the supposition that God wills to create. In this sense, a reply to the simple argument relying only on this distinction would be question-begging.

But, fortunately for the proponent of the DDS, and as I (Tomaszewski 2019) have shown, this argument commits the famous formal fallacy of substituting a contingently co-referential term into the scope of a modal operator. So the argument is simply invalid, for the reasons explained long ago in Quine (1953: Ch. 8), who gives us the following counter-example:

C1 Necessarily, 8 is greater than 7.
C2 The number of the planets is identical to 8.[7]
C3 Necessarily, the number of the planets is greater than 7.

And it is a good thing *for proponents* of the simple modal collapse argument that it is invalid, since many of them accept both of the premises of the following argument I call the "alternative argument from modal collapse":

A1 Necessarily, God exists.
A2 God is identical with the Creator.
A3 Necessarily, the Creator exists.

Both (A1) and (A2) are doctrines of all three Abrahamic religions, for example, and yet (A3) leads to precisely the same trouble as (S3), since the necessarily existence of a Creator, together with the very plausible premise that, necessarily, if there is a Creator, then there is a creation, entails the necessary existence of a creation.[8] So the form of the simple argument, if it were valid, would prove far more than most of its proponents would like.

The problem arises because while the relation of identity is metaphysically necessary (i.e., it is metaphysically impossible for anything not to be identical with itself), *identity statements* (i.e., statements asserting that an identity relation holds) are not always necessarily true, and it is *truth* that is relevant to the validity of an argument. Identity statements are not always necessarily true, because, as Kripke (1980) showed, the truth of an identity statement depends not just on whether an identity relation holds between an entity designated in one way and that same entity designated in another way, but also on the successful designation of that entity by those two designating terms. So, for example, while Saint Louis IX is identical to the King of France in 1250, and that

relation of identity holds necessarily between Saint Louis and the King of France in 1250, it is obviously *contingent* that "the King of France in 1250" designates Saint Louis and not some other man. That contingency in the relation of designation between terms appearing in an identity statement and the entities designated by those terms can make identity statements contingently true even while the relation of identity holds necessarily. Thus, while the relation of identity between God and God's act of creation (or the Creator, in the alternative argument) holds necessarily, just as the identity relation between anything else and that same thing holds necessarily, the contingency creeps in by way of designating God by the term "God's act of creation," since the relation of designation holding between this term and God is contingent, not necessary. It is contingent because, in that world in which God does not create, "God's act of creation" does not designate God, since it designates nothing at all. So while the identity relation between God and God's act of creation holds necessarily, the identity *statement* that God is identical with God's act of creation is contingently true, and therefore cannot support the conclusion that necessarily, God's act of creation exists in a valid argument.

Moreover, as I explain in Tomaszewski (2019: 279), the most obvious way of validating the argument (i.e., introducing a necessity operator in front of the second premise) involves introducing a new premise into the argument to which proponents of the DDS are *not* committed (i.e., proponents of DDS need not and should not concede that necessarily, God is identical to God's act of creation), and thereby validates the argument only at the cost of giving up on the claim that the DDS, by itself, entails a modal collapse.

Nor can one escape the simple argument by attempting to eliminate the problem of the contingency of designation by giving a *de re* reading of the simple argument. A natural way of doing so would be to use Leibniz' Law like so:

LL1 Necessarily, if God is identical to God's act of creation, then God and God's act of creation have all the same properties.
LL2 God is identical to God's act of creation.
LL3 God has the property of necessary existence.
LL4 Therefore, God's act of creation has the property of necessary existence.

While this Leibniz' Law version of the simple argument is valid (when "God's act of creation" is read *de re*), and even sound, the problem now is that (LL4) does not lead us to any modal collapse, because while God's act of creation does indeed have the property of necessary existence, and therefore exists even in that world in which God does not create, it is not an act of creation in that world, and therefore a creation need not exist in

that world. By going to a *de re* reading of "God's act of creation," the proponent of the simple argument eliminated the problem of invalidity, but only at the tremendous cost of also eliminating that implication from the conclusion to an actual modal collapse, since a modal collapse is implied by the necessary existence of God's act of creation only on a *de dicto* reading of "God's act of creation" in (LL4).

To summarize, then: the simple argument is invalid, and even if it were not invalid, arguments of the same form and appealing in no way to the DDS would prove the same disastrous conclusion as the simple argument. This latter fact is quite important, because it shows that if the fundamental intuition behind the simple argument were right (that God, being necessary, cannot be identical to anything which is contingently what it is), it would cut just as much against any Abrahamic theism as against classical theism!

12.3 Modal Indiscernibility and a New Argument

12.3.1 The DDS and Real Modal Indiscernibility

So, is the DDS out of the modal collapse woods? Not so fast! The DDS is committed to the something that I'll call "the modal indiscernibility thesis":

> **MIT** If the DDS is true, then God in any given possible world is really, intrinsically indiscernible from God is any other possible world.

MIT tells us that, on the DDS, if we look just at how God is really and intrinsically in any possible world, we could not distinguish Him on that basis from how He really is in any other possible world.[9] In other words, how God is really and intrinsically is invariant across all possible worlds. The DDS entails MIT because it excludes the possibility of any real, contingent attributes in God, for the DDS rules out any accidents in God, and God's essence does not vary really from possible world to possible world (an important fact that I'll discuss more below). So, the DDS just doesn't leave any room for real, intrinsic modal variance in God: He is really *absolutely* the same in every respect in every possible world.

The astute reader will have noticed that I included the qualification "really" in my statement of the modal indiscernibility thesis. I do not mean by "really" in this content the colloquial sense of "really" which is synonymous with "truly" and antonymous with "falsely." Rather, I mean "really" as Saint Thomas Aquinas and other Scholastic authors meant it, meaning "as the thing is in itself, prior to any cognition of it." It is antonymous to "logically"[10] in this sense, which means "as thing is in the mind, posterior to some cognition of it." This is crucially

important because at least the Thomistic doctrine of the DDS (the one I am concerned to defend) does *not* claim that there are no distinctions whatsoever in God. Rather, it claims that there are no *real*, *absolute* distinctions in God.[11] The qualification "absolute" permits relative distinctions in God arising from relations of mutual opposition such as Saint Thomas identifies with the Divine Persons in his doctrine of the Trinity and doesn't concern us here. The qualification "real" permits logical distinctions of both the virtual and purely logical varieties in God.[12] Virtual distinctions are distinctions with *some* foundation in the thing itself, insofar as that thing lends itself to the distinction made by the mind, even though that distinction is not really present in it, such as the distinction in men between their sentient life and their rational life, which are really identical but lend themselves to distinction in the mind insofar as we might say that the mind which distinguishes such things is carving the one real thing *at its joints*, to use a loose but helpful metaphor. Purely logical distinctions are distinctions with no such foundation in the thing itself, such as the distinction in Venus between the Morning Star and the Evening Star. In such distinctions, the mind is reading the distinction *into* the thing rather than reading it *out*, as in virtual distinctions.

All of the foregoing is important for two reasons. The first reason is that the distinctions between God and His acts (including that of creation), between God and His attributes, and between God and His ideas are all virtual. The second reason is that while the DDS entails the MIT, it does not entail the stronger principle that would result from omitting the qualification "really." Or put another way: the DDS *is* consistent with virtual variance in God across possible worlds, which is to say that the DDS is consistent with God being conceived (whether by us or more importantly, by God Himself) in different ways in different possible worlds. For example, the DDS is altogether compatible with God's conceiving of Himself as an act of creation in some worlds and not in another world (and doing so *truly* in both cases), or with God's conceiving of Himself (truly) as the exemplar cause of lions in those worlds where He freely creates lions and not so conceiving of Himself (again, truly) in those worlds where does not create lions.[13] All of this will be important to my solution below to the new modal collapse argument I am presently developing.

Before moving on, it is important to note briefly that the entailment from the DDS to the MIT is not without at least some controversy, at least among Thomists. Eleonore Stump seems to deny it (though she doesn't clarify if the relevant modal discernibility is real or merely logical):

> Consequently, on Aquinas's interpretation of divine simplicity, not all God's acts are necessitated; as contemporary philosophers would

put this point, God is not the same in all possible worlds. On the contrary, on Aquinas's interpretation of divine simplicity, it is in fact right to say that there is contingency in God, in our sense of the term 'contingency'. But if so, then there is no problem about God's having alternative possibilities open to him. It is true that God is not changeable across time. At each and every time, God is one and the same. But since even on the doctrine of simplicity, God can do other than he does, this is sufficient for the claim that God has free will, that God has the power to choose among alternative possibilities.

(Stump 2016: 206)

But it's not remotely clear how a rejection of the entailment from the DDS to the MIT could be right, either as a matter of what Aquinas explicitly says concerning contingency in God, or as a matter of what is consistent with Aquinas' broader account of Divine simplicity. Concerning the former, Aquinas tells us, "As regards the things which are in God himself, nothing can be described as potential: all is naturally and absolutely necessary." (*QPD* III.15 ad 11) And as to the latter, Aquinas' doctrine of Divine simplicity and general metaphysics is certainly committed to the propositions that: (i) God is necessarily really identical to His essence (*ST* I.3.3) and (ii) whatever is really essential to a thing is absolutely necessary to it.[14] But these two propositions jointly entail the MIT: if there were any real, intrinsic discernibility between God in one possible world and God in any other possible world, this would be a discernibility in His essence by proposition (i), which is impossible by proposition (ii). Nor, of course, should any theist (let alone a classical theist) be willing to countenance the suggestion that God could differ *essentially* across possible worlds.[15]

But how does MIT lead to a modal collapse? Recall premise (S2) of the simple argument from modal collapse above: God is identical to His act of creation. If God is identical to His act of creation, and God is also really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds, as the DDS entails, then although God may not *be identical to* an act of creation in that possible world in which He does not create, He is nevertheless *really, intrinsically indiscernible* from one, because He is really, intrinsically indiscernible from how He is in the actual world, and in the actual world, He is identical to an act of creation.[16] But how could God be really, intrinsically indiscernible from an act of creation in those possible worlds in which He doesn't create?

12.3.2 The Modal Indiscernibility Argument

We can turn this puzzle into a new, valid, stronger argument from modal collapse against the DDS:

MI1 God is absolutely simple.

MI2 If God is absolutely simple, then He is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds.

MI3 If God is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds, then His act is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds.

MI4 If God's act is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds, then the effects of this act do not really vary across all possible worlds.[17]

MI5 Therefore, the effects of God's act do not really vary across all possible worlds.

I'll call this "the modal indiscernibility argument" (or "MI argument" for short). The MI argument is plainly valid, and (MI5) is a modal collapse.

Does the proponent of the DDS have any reasonable reply? Since the argument is valid, the proponent of the DDS must reject at least one premise. (MI1) just states the DDS, so obviously not that one. (MI2) is a restatement of the MIT, which I've explained and defended above; rejection of (MI2) is not consistent with the DDS, so that premise must stay as well. Likewise, (MI3) is entailed by the DDS: insofar as God's act is intrinsic to Him, it cannot vary across possible worlds any more than anything else really intrinsic to Him, given the MIT.[18] So it's the rejection of (MI4) or bust for the proponent of DDS. And indeed, this will be the premise I would counsel the proponent of the DDS to reject.

12.4 What's Simplicity Got to Do With It, Anyway?

But it's not just the proponent of the DDS that ought to reject (MI4). Every theist who accepts that God exists necessarily, accepts that God has at least a modal essence, and accepts the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) ought to reject (MI4). To see why, consider this argument parallel to the MI argument:

EMI1 God exists necessarily.

EMI2 If God exists necessarily, then God's essence is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds.

EMI3 If God's essence is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds, then the effects of God's essence do not really vary across all possible worlds.

EMI4 If the effects of God's essence do not vary across all possible worlds, then God's nonessential attributes do not really vary across all possible worlds.

EMI5 If God's nonessential attributes do not really vary across all possible worlds, then God's act is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds.

EMI6   If God's act is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds, then the effects of this act do not really vary across all possible worlds.

EMI7   Therefore, the effects of God's act do not really vary across all possible worlds.

I'll call this "the essential modal indiscernibility argument" (or "EMI argument" for short). Swinburne is the only well-known author who even remotely plausibly denies (EMI1), and even his denial is plausibly only of God's *logically* necessary existence. (Swinburne 2004: 79) I'll set aside going forward the thesis that God exists with only metaphysical contingency, especially because it seems clear to me that such a claim is more absurd than even a modal collapse.

The second premise is a commitment of essentialism about God: if God has any essence whatsoever[19] and exists necessarily, this is just for that essence to be really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds. Or, to put it more bluntly, any possible God whose essence is really discernible from the essence of the actual God would be a numerically distinct God.

The nonclassical theist rejects (EMI3) only at the price of giving the classical theist an adequate excuse to reject (MI4), since (EMI3) is simply a restatement of (MI4) with God's essence substituted for God's act. If what is caused or grounded by God's act cannot vary across all possible worlds unless God's act is really discernible across all possible worlds, then what is caused or grounded by God's essence cannot vary across all possible worlds unless God's essence is really discernible across all possible worlds. At the very least, the proponent of the MI argument would owe us a very strong reason to think that God's act is relevantly different from God's essence in this respect, and how so. (EMI4) is true, in turn, because God's nonessential attributes (if He has any) can only be caused or grounded by either God's essence or by His other nonessential attributes.[20] Appeal to God's other nonessential attributes would lead to a regress that, in turn, could be terminated only by appeal to God's essence. So, ultimately, all nonessential Divine attributes must be caused or grounded by God's essence. Suppose, on the contrary, that the nonclassical theist claimed that some of God's nonessential attributes are *uncaused*. Then they are either necessary or contingent. If they are necessary, then the consequent of (EMI4) is still true. If they are contingent, then the nonclassical theist is positing contingent, uncaused entities, which violates the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). This is a serious problem not only because the PSR is at the heart of many cosmological arguments for the existence of God, but also because it opens the door for the classical theist to escape by the same means: if the nonclassical theist can posit contingent, uncaused Divine attributes, then the classical theist can posit contingent, uncaused entities outside of God altogether,

and so escape a modal collapse. And so, by (EMI3), God's nonessential attributes cannot vary across all possible worlds.

Since God's act is one of God's attributes, it is either essential or nonessential. If it is essential, then it cannot vary across all possible worlds, and if it is nonessential, then by (EMI4) it cannot vary across all possible worlds. Not to really vary across all possible worlds is, by definition, to be really, intrinsically indiscernible at all possible worlds. Thus, (EMI5).

Finally, what is left is (EMI6), which is identical to (MI4). So, I think the nonclassical theist ought to reject (EMI6). But he does so only at the price of allowing the classical theist to reject (MI4) and escape modal collapse as well! The only other option left to the nonclassical theist is to accept (EMI6) alongside the other premises of the EMI argument and therefore accept (EMI7), which is the very modal collapse that he has been warning the classical theist is entailed by the DDS.

Allow me briefly to summarize the parallel between the MI argument and the EMI argument more informally, but perhaps more insightfully. The central worry at the heart of the MI argument is just this: if God is absolutely the same in every possible world, how could His created effects be different across all possible worlds? But, crucially, the EMI argument shows us that this is not a worry faced only by classical theists, for nonclassical theists escape this worry only by positing nonessential, contingent attributes in God that themselves must be caused or grounded by something that is really, intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds, namely the Divine essence. That is, by introducing the composition into God, the nonclassical theist only *pushes back* one step the central worry animating the MI argument, rather than eliminating it. Thus, that central worry is a worry for any theist who posits an essence for a necessarily existing God and accepts the PSR, not just for classical theists who accept the DDS. In fact, we can go a step further and say that it is a worry for anybody who accepts that all contingent things find their ultimate cause or ground in one or more necessary things, which is a very broad class of people indeed! Arguably, it is everybody who accepts a sufficiently robust version of the PSR.

What we have found, then, is that just as with the simple argument from modal collapse examined above, the central worry behind the MI argument is a worry not just for classical theists, but for most theists in general. And whatever nonclassical theists might say to escape that worry is something that can be translated rather readily into an equally viable escape from modal collapse for the classical theist. This urges the question: does the modal collapse objection to the DDS (in any of its formulations) really have anything to do with Divine simplicity? It seems not. If it does, its proponents need to tell us exactly how the DDS is supposed to contribute to that collapse over and above the contribution to it made by the fact that, on most theisms and even some atheisms, at

some point, the contingent is derived from the necessary. We are all in that same boat.

12.5 Creative Determinism and Hyperintensionality

12.5.1 Creative Determinism

So, what is almost everybody who is confronted by this problem to do? As I said above, the classical theist ought to reject (MI4). Those familiar with the literature on determinism will have recognized (MI4) for what it is: an assertion of a deterministic causal relation between God's act (considered really and intrinsically) and God's created effects. But what reason does the classical theist (or anybody else, for that matter) have to accept such a determinism, especially in a context in which there is so little evidence for it? Many claim that the success of the natural sciences since modernity is evidence of physical determinism, but assuming that there is a God, what reason is there for thinking that the relation between God's real creative act and what that act causes is deterministic? None whatsoever. Indeed, as Elizabeth Anscombe, in her critical and very relevant "Causation and Determination," argues against a broader determinism:

> There is something to observe here, that lies under our noses. It is little attended to, and yet still so obvious as to seem trite. It is this: causality consists in the derivativeness of an effect from its causes. This is the core, the common feature, of causality in its various kinds. Effects derive from, arise out of, come of, their causes. For example, everyone will grant that physical parenthood is a causal relation. Here the derivation is material, by fission. Now analysis in terms of necessity or universality does not tell us of this derivedness of the effect; rather it forgets about that. For the necessity will be that of laws of nature; through it we shall be able to derive knowledge of the effect from knowledge of the cause, or vice versa, but that does not show us the cause as source of the effect. Causation, then, is not to be identified with necessitation.
>
> (Anscombe 1981: 136)

And if there were any such reason, this would only return us to the parallel described above: if the causal or grounding relation between the Divine real creative act and the effects of that act is deterministic, why should we think that the causal or grounding relation between God's essence and His nonessential attributes is indeterministic?[21]

  Importantly, one might think that rejection of such a deterministic causal relation between God's real creative act and His created effects will, in turn, require us to reject what Alexander Pruss calls

"contrastive PSR," the principle that every proposition of the form *P rather than Q* has an explanation.[22] This is because, if we reject such a deterministic causal relation, how could we explain why God created world W_1 rather than world W_2, where W_1 and W_2 are any two distinct possible worlds?

Supposing for a moment that this is so, the classical theist (and other theists in the modal collapse boat with him) should not fear. For such contrastive explanations are just as unavailable for indeterministic free choices (necessary for free will as understood by libertarians) and possibly many quantum phenomena (deterministic theories consistent with the experimental data exist but are unpopular with scientists)[23] as they are for the classical theist. The classical theist would therefore be in broad and arguably good company in rejecting contrastive PSR.

12.5.2 The Hyperintensionality of Creative Causal Contexts

But the classical theist in fact need make no such concession. Nor need he, strictly speaking, reject a deterministic causal relation between God's act of creation and the created effects thereof. All of this is because God's act of creation is the *action* of an intelligent Agent, and thus the fruit, in part, of His intellectual activity and Divine wisdom. That is to say that the Divine creative act is *posterior to* God's cognition of Himself, and is, therefore, really identical to God, but virtually distinct from Him. And mental causation of the sort that God is engaged in when He creates is hyperintensional: even necessarily coreferring terms cannot be substituted *salva veritate* into the context of a sentence reporting an instance of mental causation.[24] For a very pedestrian example, consider:

R1 Thinking that I saw Jack the Ripper caused me to run away.
R2 Thinking that I saw Francis Tumblety caused me to run away.

Both (R1) and (R2) report instances of mental causation, but (R1) does not entail (R2) even if we grant that "Jack the Ripper" and "Francis Tumblety" necessarily co-refer because both are rigidly designating names and Francis Tumblety was Jack the Ripper (which is very unlikely, but he was a suspect for a time).

Now, compare:

Z1 God's idea of zebras caused zebras to exist.
Z2 God's idea of unicorns caused zebras to exist.

Here, (Z1) is true while (Z2) is obviously false, even though God's idea of zebras is necessarily really identical to God's idea of unicorns (and to the Divine essence).[25]

Thus, we can keep a deterministic causal relation between the Divine creative act and the effects thereof, as well as contrastive PSR (at least as far as *this* one question goes), if we bear in mind that the Cause in question is virtually distinct from the Divine essence (because it is posterior God's cognition of Himself) and that mental causation is hyper-intensional.

One might wonder or object here: how can God's intellectual activity, or the Divine ideas which figure in His creative act, differ from possible world to possible world without any difference in how God *really* is across possible worlds? This is simply a fundamental truth about the intentional order: it is considerably and necessarily more fine-grained than the real order. Consider, for example, a triangle: one and the same real thing, without any real difference, can be conceptualized either as *triangular* or as *trilateral*. Or consider the number 2: one and the same real thing, without any real difference, can be conceptualized either as *the first prime* or as *half of 4*. These concepts are obviously distinct in the intentional order. But they also obviously necessarily represent one and the same real thing. And such examples abound. So, one cannot insist against the defender of the DDS that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the real order and the intentional order, and therefore there can be no decisive objection here against logical discernibility in God across possible worlds without real discernibility in God across those same possible worlds.

It's true, of course, that the situation is more complicated with God: my model requires logical discernibility in God considered as an intellectual Agent (that is, as One Who has different ideas) and as intellectual activity (that is, as the cognition of different ideas) and not merely considered as intentional object (that is, as the ideas themselves), as in my examples with the triangle and the number 2. But no matter: once the possibility of a one-to-one correspondence between the intentional order and the real order falls, it falls altogether. Or, at least, there is no reason to think that one could reasonably insist on such a correspondence for intellectual agents or activities but not for intentional objects. At a bare minimum, one pressing such an objection would owe us a substantial account of how such a correspondence could exist for intellectual agents or activities without being possible for intentional objects. A simplified version of the essence of my reply, then, is this: if there is logical "room" in the real objects of cognition for logically distinct ideas, then there is no obviously good objection to the claim that there is such logical "room" in the real intellectual agents and activities that generate those logically distinct ideas, as well.

How, then, does God's intellectual activity differ from possible world to possible world without any real difference in Him? Simply in virtue of being *intellectual* activity. No further explanation is necessary, and its possibility, at least to me, is doubtful at best.

12.6 A Conclusion to Modal Collapse

From a very plausible beginning, the modal collapse worry and the arguments pressing it have collapsed: the simple argument is invalid and has a form that would lead to a modal collapse for nonclassical theists as well as classical theists. And the modal indiscernibility argument, along with the fundamental intuition behind it, similarly finds both classical and nonclassical theists alike in the boat of alleged modal collapse, because classical and nonclassical theists alike are in the logically fraught game of deriving the metaphysically contingent from the metaphysically necessary.

But it is actually the careful distinction drawn by Aquinas and other Scholastics between the real distinction and the virtual distinction, together with a careful consideration of the role of the Divine intellect in the creative act, that shows us how we can reconcile the noble aspiration of the classical theist for a First Cause devoid of all composition and potentiality with God's ability to determine whether and what He creates.

Notes

1 As with most doctrines, the doctrine of Divine simplicity comes in several versions due to various authors. In this paper, my focus will be on the Thomistic version, according to which there is no real distinction between God and His attributes (and therefore between any attribute and any other), between God and His essence, between His essence and His existence, and between God and anything in Him which, in creatures, would be accidental, including His acts. I focus on the Thomistic version of the doctrine both because it is the most controversial popular version of the doctrine, giving a background against which most of the debate surrounding the doctrine revolves, and also because it is the strongest popular version, such that if the objection I discuss in this paper fails against the Thomistic version of the doctrine, it likewise will fail against any weaker version of the doctrine.

2 That God created (and more generally, in all He does, acts) freely is widely attested in Scripture and the Christian Tradition. "Whatsoever the Lord hath pleased he hath done, in heaven, in earth, in the sea, and in all the deeps." (Ps. cxxxiv: 6) And it is an explicit dogma at least for Catholics, as defined by the Fathers of the First Vatican Council: "This sole true God by His goodness and 'omnipotent power,' not to increase His own beatitude, and not to add to, but to manifest His perfection by the blessings which He bestows on creatures, with most free volition, 'immediately from the beginning of time fashioned each creature out of nothing, spiritual and corporeal, namely angelic and mundane; and then the human creation, common as it were, composed of both spirit and body.'" (Denzinger §1783) And: "If anyone does not confess that the world and all things which are contained in it, both spiritual and material, as regards their whole substance, have been produced by God from nothing, or, shall have said that God created not by a volition free of all necessity, but as necessarily as He necessarily loves Himself, or, shall have denied that the world was created to the glory of God: let him be anathema." (Denzinger §1805)

3 For reasons that I will explain below, it is crucial to understand that all that must be rejected is a determination of the effects of the Divine creative act by that act considered as *really identical* with the temporally and modally immutable Divine Essence. We need not (and should not, on pain of denying God's perfect freedom in choosing whether and what to create and His ongoing Providence over His created effects) reject a determination of the effects of the Divine creative act by that act considered as *virtually distinct* from the Divine Essence.

4 It is a formalization of the argument found in Mullins (2016: 138), though without the subargument found there for premise (S2).

5 It is important to see that God's act of creation can be designated as specifically as one likes in this argument to make necessary not just a creation, but the creation of the actual world, exactly as it is, down to every detail.

6 See *ST* I.19.3.

7 Note that it would a serious mistake to reject Quine's counterexample due to thinking that (C2) is false because the number of the planets *instantiates* 8 rather than being identical to it. It is true, of course, that *the planets* instantiate the number 8, but *the number of the planets* does not instantiate 8, because the number of the planets is a number, and no number plausibly instantiates a number except for 1, which instantiates itself since it is just one thing, like every other number.

8 And just as with the simple argument, the Creator can be designated as specifically as one likes, to make necessary not just a creation, but the creation of the actual world, down to every last detail.

9 Thomists and other Aristotelians have occasionally complained that the Kripkean semantics of possible worlds is inadequate to capture the Aristotelian theory of modality. I'm not sure about this complaint, but those who are needn't worry about my usage of the term "possible world" throughout this paper, as I mean to refer by it only to ersatz possible worlds as a convenient shorthand for the global possibilities for the actual world. In my usage, therefore, Aristotle and Aquinas could have easily spoken of "possible worlds."

10 The term "conceptually" is also sometimes used, but I will use "logically."

11 As to the compatibility of virtual distinctions in God with the Thomistic DDS, see *QPD* IX.8 ad 4. As to the compatibility of relative distinctions with the Thomistic DDS, see *In Sent.* d. 2, q. 1, a. 3.

12 See Feser (2014: §1.3) for an introductory treatment of the Scholastic theory of distinctions.

13 See Doolan (2008) for a full treatment of God and His ideas as exemplar causes in Aquinas' work.

14 This latter claim is, of course, a principle that almost everybody who endorses essentialism about anything endorses concerning essence. Aquinas endorses it explicitly: "Now whatever is absolutely necessary differs from the other types of necessity, because absolute necessity belongs to a thing by reason of something that is intimately and closely connected with it, whether it be the form or the matter or the very essence of a thing." (*In Meta.* V.6.883)

15 Thanks to Eleonore Stump and Alexander Pruss for discussion of this issue.

16 Here, the advocate of the modal collapse worry might sense an opening: if God is really, intrinsically indiscernible from an act of creation, then, by the identity of indiscernibles, He is an act of creation. And since He is so indiscernible in every possible world, He is an act of creation in

every possible world! But this is too fast for at least three reasons. Firstly, as Max Black (1952) has famously argued, the identity of indiscernibles is very questionable in general. Secondly, the identity of *transworld* indiscernibles, which is what this objection would require to cause problems, being strictly logically stronger than an intraworld principle of the identity of indiscernibles, is even less plausible than it. Thirdly, God is only really and intrinsically indiscernible across possible worlds. Crucially, He is logically and extrinsically discernible across possible worlds, and His being an act of creation is, at least on classical theism, precisely one of God's extrinsic properties at least in the sense that His possession of it depends on at least one thing that is not God, namely the existence of at least one creature.

17 "Effects" here should be read broadly enough to include not just the relata of a causation relation, but also what is grounded in a grounding relation, especially if one thinks that the relation between contingent attributes and essence (if any) or Creator and creature is one of grounding. I take it that, at this point in the dialectic over the modal collapse objection to the DDS, that nothing rides on whether the relation between either of these two sets of relata is that of causation or that of grounding.

18 Of course, something *extrinsic* to God is ultimately necessary in order for His act to count as an act of creation, namely a creation.

19 The only sense of "essence" necessary for the EMI argument to work is that of modal essence, or a set of properties possessed by a thing in every world in which it exists.

20 Fruitful appeal to variance in either creatures or necessary but nonessential attributes across possible worlds cannot be made here, because variance in creatures across possible worlds is the very phenomenon the argument concludes against (and so appeal to it to reject (EMI4) in response to the EMI argument would be question-begging), and because necessary attributes cannot vary across possible worlds despite their nonessentiality.

21 I think there is, in general, a great deal more reason to accept grounding necessitation than causal determinism, but that should be seen simply as reason to think that the relation between God's essence and God's nonessential attributes, or God's creative act and His created effects, is that of causation and not grounding.

22 See Pruss (2006: 148-155) for critical discussion of the principle.

23 For philosophical discussion of such a theory, see Goldstein (2021).

24 See Nolan (2014) for a broader discussion of hyperintensionality and its importance in metaphysics.

25 See *ST* I.15.2 ad 1.

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13 Defending Divine Impassibility

James E. Dolezal

Divine impassibility is an indispensable feature of classical theism and arguably its most assailed in the contemporary literature. The doctrine maintains that God undergoes no actualization or change in his being from causes either within or without. Impassibility's core claim is that God is without passions. A passion (from the Latin *passio* and *patior*; and the Greek πάσχω and πάθος) is that which is suffered, undergone, or experienced. Nothing happens to or befalls a being who is not subject to passions. The impassible God, accordingly, undergoes and experiences nothing.

Passion can be understood in either a general or proper sense. Thomas Aquinas writes, "In its general sense passion is the reception of something in any way at all … . In its proper sense passion is used of motion, since action and passion consist in motion, inasmuch as it is by way of motion that reception in a patient takes place" (Aquinas 1952–54, q. 26, a. 1). Since Thomas regards motion as properly ascribed only to bodies no immaterial being, such as God or angel, can properly be said to be passible. It is the general sense that I intend to defend in this chapter as it generates the most controversy in current treatments of the topic. My defense draws largely on resources in the Thomistic tradition.

Classical theists deny that God receives any actuality of being from an agent. As Thomas observes, "Passion is the effect of the agent on the patient" (Aquinas 2012, I-II, q. 26, a. 2: *passio est effectus agentis in patiente*). An agent is "that which by its activity influences the being of another" and a patient is "that which is affected or being changed by another" (Klubertanz 1963, p. 163). Yet in God nothing is caused or made to be. This means that whatever may be the character of God's relationship to the world, it is not one in which the creature produces anything in God—no knowledge, pain, or pleasure. The righteous man or woman gives him nothing, and the sinner does nothing to him (see Job 35:6–7). Aquinas states, "the sinner, by sinning, cannot do God any actual harm" (Aquinas 2012, I-II, q. 47, q. 1, ad 1; Cf. Dolezal 2019, pp. 22–23). Humans are not agents who actualize potential in God as our patient because God is not among the beings who are "done unto" by a cause. He gives to all but receives from none.

13.1 Motivation and Rationale for Divine Impassibility

A thorough defense of divine impassibility would require an investigation into the motivations underlying it. Space will not permit an adequate examination of these motives, and so a brief sketch will have to suffice. (For lengthier treatments see Weinandy 2000; Dodds 2008; Weigel 2008; Emery 2009; and Dolezal 2011.) Divine impassibility is rightly understood as an entailment of several other truths to which classical theists adhere. Its deepest stimulus, arguably, derives from God's primal causality.

The world requires a sufficient reason that adequately accounts for its being and becoming. And though the world is full of a variety of causes, none of these is sufficient in itself to ground and explain its own existence. In the world we discover countless moved movers and caused causes, each depending on a causal principle or agent more basic than itself. No link on this chain of caused causes is the sufficient reason for itself and no number of non-self-sufficient causes can supply an adequate reason for the causal chain as such. What is needed to answer the deepest *why* question—Why is there something rather than nothing at all?—is a *per se* first cause that is itself not susceptible to a cause. That is, something which is the sufficient reason for itself and depends upon nothing in order to be or to operate. For the classical theist, any being that fails to meet this requirement just is not God. Aquinas writes, "there can be nothing caused in God, since He is the first cause" (2012, I, q. 3, a. 6). This requirement of God's uncaused self-sufficiency gives rise to the core tenants of classical theism: pure actuality, divine simplicity, impassibility, immutability, and timelessness. Each of these follows from God's self-sufficient primacy of being and causality and is meant to ensure that that primacy is not obscured or compromised.

Pure actuality holds pride of place, especially for Thomists, among the implications flowing from God's primal causality. God "is act both pure and primary," declares Aquinas (1952, q. 1, a. 1). Passive potency or potentiality can have no place in the first cause of being. Thomas states the rationale of this claim: "this first being must be pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is posterior to act" (Aquinas 2012, I, q. 9, a. 1). He enlarges on this in his *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*:

> Now although in one and the same thing that is at one time in act, at another time in potentiality, potentiality precedes act in time but follows it in nature: yet absolutely speaking act precedes potentiality not only in nature, but also in time, since everything that is in potentiality is made actual by some being that is in act. Accordingly the being that made all things actual, and itself proceeds from no

other being, must be the first actual being without any admixture of potentiality. For were it in any way in potentiality, there would be need of another previous being to make it actual.

<div align="right">(Aquinas 1952, q. 7, a. 1)</div>

In the existential sense, nothing can be self-actualized because a being must be in act in order to bestow act. A thing cannot give what it does not have. The absolute first being and cause of all things must not be from another and thus must simply be the act by which he is and by which he actualizes all other things. But he would not be the act by which he is if he were also possessed of passive potency. This is because passive potency is a principle of being irreducibly distinct from actuality. It is that principle by which a thing is capable of receiving act. Act is more complete in being than is passive potency. No being possessed of passive potency can be strictly identical with the act by which it exists and operates; it has in it that which is not act. It is a being that *has* act as a *principle* of being and thus is a being that is caused to be by that which is not itself, strictly speaking. Consider that every created substance is really distinct from the act of existence (*esse*) by which it exists. If this were the case with God, then that which is not God himself, his *esse*, would be in him causing him to be. Only the being who is existence itself subsisting (*ipsum esse subsistens*) can be the sufficient reason for itself and all other things.

The act of existence is the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections (see Aquinas 1952, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9: *esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum*) and so is the most basic and fundamental reality from which all actual being and perfection must derive. Since passion is always something actualized and requires passive potency as its precondition, God must be passionless pure act. Thomas writes, "every passion belongs to something existing in potency. But God is completely free from potency, since He is pure act. God, therefore, is solely agent, and in no way does any passion have a place in Him" (Aquinas 1955, I, c. 89). God acts on and in all things, but he is in no way acted upon.

Divine simplicity follows from this of necessity. If God is pure act, then he must not be composed of parts. This is because in all composite entities parts relate to each other as principles of act and passive potency. *Esse* actualizes essence. Form actualizes matter. Accidents actualize substances formally. Substances actualize accidents existentially. And so forth. In every composite one discovers a profound network of dependency just insomuch as wholes depend upon their parts to be as they are. Parts which, as parts, are less than wholes, actualize wholes in some respect and therefore relate to them as so many causes. Thomas states, "Every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being" (Aquinas 2012, I, q. 3, a. 7). In the

order of metaphysical dependence, parts precede those things composed of them; yet nothing precedes the absolute source of all being. If God were composed of parts, he would not be self-sufficient but would require principles of being really distinct from himself—as all parts are distinct from those entities in which they are integrated—to be as he is.

In addition to dependency upon the parts themselves, all composite entities also depend upon whatever supplies unity to the parts. The parts as such do not fund this unity. Thomas unfolds the logic of this claim: "seeing that composition requires difference in the component parts, these different parts require an agent to unite them together: since different things as such are not united. Now every composite has being through the union of its component parts. Therefore every composite depends on a pre-existing agent: and consequently the first being which is God, from whom all things proceed, cannot be composite" (Aquinas 1952, q. 7, a. 1).

Divine simplicity also proscribes passions in God because passions are a species of accident that only exist in composition with a substance that is modified by those passions. Those subjects that undergo passions are causally affected so as to be moved into new states of being. Moreover, passions are states of being that come upon a subject through the operation of some agent acting on it. They are the agent's effect in the patient. If God were passionate in any way we would, in principle, be able to work up a causal ancestry to explain God's own actuality of being. This would place God among the things that are made to be and that depend upon causes. This would militate against any notion of God as the absolute primal cause.

Undoubtedly, impassibility and its underlying motivations require the classical theist to say all sorts of strange and unusual things about God and his operations. These peculiarities generate no small amount of perplexity among modern philosophers and theologians and are the source of much of the recent disparagement of the doctrine. In what follows I will examine and respond to one of the preeminent objections to God's impassibility—the critique from knowledge—and attempt to show that the classical theist is better equipped to account for God's knowledge and care of the creature than is the passibilist.

13.2 Passibilist Critique from Knowledge

Several modern critics of impassibility contend that an impassible God necessarily lacks a complete knowledge of his creatures and so is not omniscient. This lack of knowledge also means God is incapable of sympathy and so is unable to properly care about and love the creature, suffering being said to be indispensable to true love. Richard Creel argues that since the present is ever in flux, and since God knows the present perfectly, then God's knowledge must be in flux as well. God

himself must be undergoing changes in order to account for his perfect knowledge of the changes in present affairs. "God's knowledge of the present is perfect and exhaustive," writes Creel, "but it is dependent on what is (God does not know what is apart from what is) and what is contingently is subject to change. Therefore God's knowledge of what is contingently must be mutable, and not only mutable but passible, i.e., subject to change by what is actual and distinct from God." He adds, "The awareness of the knower must be passible to the changing object. This seems true of God as well as for all other knowers" (Creel 1986, pp. 87, 88).

Henry Simoni observes that traditional notions of divine transcendence hold that, "God does not have to experience pain, pleasure or ignorance from the inside, nor include it is within God's being." But according to Simoni, this presents a conundrum for divine omniscience "because we would have to give up the idea that God really knows the world in its lived texture" (1997, 333). Without passible experiences it seems God cannot have all knowledge: "One of the most convincing reasons for strong passibility is that it explains omniscience. If we give up passibility, omniscience becomes problematical because it is unclear what knowledge means if it includes no experiential content. If God is not a mirror of experience, then God does not 'know' that experience. … If God cannot feel pain, boredom, surprise or empathy for another's welfare, God seems to lack 'knowledge' of basic facts" (Simoni 1997, pp. 345–346). This echoes Charles Hartshorne's concern about knowing sorrow without experiencing it: "what does it mean to know what sorrow is, but never to have sorrow, never to have felt the quality of suffering? I find nothing in my experience that gives meaning to this set of words" (1948, pp. 55–56). Passibility is thus asserted to be a crucial component for understanding the experiences of others. One recalls the famous statement of Alfred North Whitehead that, "God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands" (1978, p. 351).

One underlying motivation for this line of argument is the conviction that experiencing the pains and joys of others, even if in some simulated fashion, is an intimate and personal way of knowing that cannot be achieved by mere propositional knowledge. Experiential knowledge provides cognitional access to the interiority of others in an altogether unique manner. This trades on a conception of the person as a subject of experience. The more experiential the manner of one's knowledge, the more truly personal it will be. E. J. Lowe, writing about human persons, states, "I take persons or selves … to be subjects of experience" (Lowe 1996, p. 5). The experiential character of such a one's state of mind is necessarily affected by its object: "Experiences are *occurrent*, as opposed to dispositional, states of mind; and the experiencing mind is being affected in some way of which it is currently aware, even if only confusedly" (Lowe 1996, p. 97). Except for the confusion, most modern

passibilists assimilate this understanding to their conception of divine personhood.

Linda Zagzebski has proposed adding the attribute of omnisubjectivity to the traditional attributes of God. This is an attribute by which God is said to experience a simulated "copy" of all our experiences and thus to know his creatures in an empathic way. If we share in God's life, as the Christian tradition teaches (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Pet 1:4), then it would seem he shares in ours as well. This is because, as Zagzebski states, "intimate sharing between two persons always goes both ways" (2013, p. 50). This means that while humans receive something from God, he also receives something from us, namely, a copy of all our first-person experiences and viewpoints, every subjective "what it is like" (*qualia*). If God only knows *about* our states of mind but does not know according to the same modality (viz., experience), then he does not know perfectly: "It seems that God cannot know with complete accuracy what it is like to be in the conscious state of his creatures without having had conscious states exactly like those of each one of his creatures" (Zagzebski 2016, p. 437). This empathic mode of knowing demands that God acquire states of mind for himself from his creatures since, as Zagzebski notes, "empathy is a way of acquiring an emotion like that of another person" (2016, 440). Divine empathic knowledge involves "the transference of all psychic states from a human to God" (2016, p. 441). God is the patient in this transfer whose passive potency for cognition is reduced to act. If God did not undergo this transference, he would be lacking cognitive acquaintance with the creature in some profound way. "If omnisubjectivity is total perfect empathy, it is the most intimate acquaintance possible compatible with separate selves. … God is not omniscient unless he is omnisubjective" (Zagzebski 2016, p. 443). Since this is a knowledge that God receives from the creature in some way, it cannot cohere with divine impassibility. Zagzebski is clear on this point: "a perfect copy of pain is surely ruled out by impassibility, as is a copy of every other sensation or emotion, whether positive or negative. A perfectly empathic being is affected by what is outside of him, even if his empathic states are not literally sensations or emotions. I think, then, that omnisubjectivity is incompatible with impassibility" (2013, pp. 44–45).

R. T. Mullins develops Zagzebski's position in a moral direction. He wonders if an impassible God is truly virtuous since any virtuous person will be disturbed by witnessing a horrendous event and an impassible God cannot be subject to disturbances. Those who are incapable of being disturbed lack the virtue of caring about such events; they simply cannot be emotionally "attuned to reality" (2020, p. 15). Such emotional attunement requires passibility as a precondition in the virtuous person. In this scheme, the actualizing source of God's knowledge and empathic concern for the creature is the creature itself. All empathic knowledge is thus derivative. Mullins elaborates, "In order for God to have empathic knowledge of some other person, God's knowledge must be grounded in,

and derived from that person. God's empathic knowledge involves God having an empathic perceptual experience of another person … . [E] mpathic knowledge, like experiential knowledge in general, is a form of knowledge by acquaintance. One cannot have such knowledge without being acquainted with the world in some way. Hence, God is moved by the world that he has created" (2020, p. 34). The world funds God's knowledge of the world, and so Mullins insists that God must know experientially in order to know "what it is like" for the creature to have the experiences it has. "[The] passible God," he concludes, "knows more than the classical God" (2020, p. 18; Cf. Sarot 1991; Scrutton 2013, pp. 870–871).

It follows that the passible God is also more loving: "[I]t would seem that impassibility prevents God from being able to comprehend His creatures, and thus prevents God from being united with His creatures in love." An impassible God simply cannot satisfy "the conditions of comprehension needed for mutual closeness" (Mullins 2020, p. 46). Simoni draws the same conclusion and asserts, "Rejecting passibility totally and maintaining objective omniscience … would leave us with a rather aloof and unsympathetic divinity" (1997, p. 342). Just as sharing in the experiences of others enables humans to better know and care for one another, so God must share in emotional experiences, or at least a copy of them, to best know and care about the creature's pains and pleasures.

Another aspect of this critique is the challenge it makes to the classical theist understanding of divine perfection and independence as complete self-sufficiency. Hartshorne argues that God's maximal happiness and completeness is bound up in an eminent dependence upon the creature. The more dependent God is upon the creature, the more exact his happiness will be. Independence, according to Hartshorne, is more fitting to those on the bottom of the scale of being than on the top. The notion that God has zero dependence upon the creature is an "unwarranted assumption" that exhibits "metaphysical snobbery toward relativity, dependence, or passivity, toward responsiveness or sensitivity, this almost slavish … worship of mere absoluteness, independence, and one-sided activity or power, this transcendentalized admiration of politico-ecclesiastical tyranny, the ideal of which is to act on all while avoiding reaction from them … ." (Hartshorne 1948, p. 50). Jürgen Moltmann is equally repulsed by a God whose independence keeps him from suffering: "For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. … The 'unmoved Mover' is a 'loveless Beloved' … . [H]e is the beloved who is in love with himself; a Narcissus in a metaphysical degree: *Deus incurvatus in se*" (1974, p. 222). Moltmann recasts the notion of divine completeness as that which is received by God through experience. An impassible God would be "an incomplete being, for he cannot experience helplessness and powerlessness. … He would be a being without

experience, a being without density and a being who is loved by no one … . [S]uch a God is not a necessary and supreme being, but a highly dispensable and superfluous being" (1974, p. 223). God does require a complete fullness of being, but for Hartshorne and Moltmann such fullness can only be meaningful and praiseworthy if it is derived by God from the creature. Paul Fiddes observes, "A suffering God like this would be affected and changed by the world, not to become less God but to become more richly himself, fulfilling his being through the world" (1988, p. 57).

13.3 Critique of the Critique

Obviously, classical theism and theistic passibilism stand in stark contrast to each other. Before proposing an impassibilist approach to God's knowledge, I will offer a brief critique of the passibilist critique. I will first consider an internal weakness of the argument itself and then explore some of the deeper theological liabilities that plague the critics' position.

   The passibilist argument says an impassible God cannot know first-person human experiences or *qualia*—"how it feels" or "what it is like"—unless he himself has the same experience, or receives a copy of them. But this seems to trade on premises that are neither self-evident nor demonstrated. The major premise is that the *exclusive* route to true and perfect knowledge of another's experience is by either undergoing the experience for oneself or by suffering a simulation or copy of it. One cannot have the perfection of knowledge without undergoing some sort of *movement* toward it. Consider Marcel Sarot's claim: "[S]ome knowledge cannot be gathered by means other than experience. If God is not able to experience pain, He will be in the same plight as people who are not able to experience pain … . He will lack experiential knowledge of pain, and therefore He will not be fully omniscient" (1991, p. 95). The impassibilist can readily grant, even if for argument's sake, that this is how one human comes to be acquainted with and care about other humans. Empathic knowledge really is a unique way of getting to know the experiences of others. But the fact that it is this way for rational animals is no proof that it *must* be this way for intellectual beings of a different nature, such as angels or God. If one has cognitive access to another's *qualia* in a way other than through experience, as God arguably does (see the discussion on causal knowledge below), then passibility would not be strictly necessary for the knowledge of another's experiences, or for omniscience generally. The critique from knowledge makes an unwarranted assumption that since empathic knowledge is required for humans to gain cognitional access to the experiential knowledge of other humans, it must be required for God's knowledge too. This univocal notion of knowledge begs the question and prejudices the theological outcome. The nature

of the knower must be taken into account when attempting to answer the question of how that knower knows. Aquinas writes, "Knowledge is according to the mode of the one who knows; for the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. Now since the mode of the divine essence is higher than that of creatures, divine knowledge does not exist in God after the mode of created knowledge" (2012, I, q. 14, a. 1, ad 3). The critics presuppose, without offering convincing reasons, a mono-modal way of knowing and then demand that God's nature fall in line with that modality.

More concerning are the theological implications of the critics' argument. They affirm a dependent deity. First, they conceive God's omniscience as something that is built up in him bit by bit as the agency of creatures operates to actualize his intellectual potential. God is beholden to that which is not God for his actuality of knowledge. This has significant implications for God's wisdom as Creator. If God is the Creator of all things and the one by whom all creatures move (see the Apostle Paul's words in Acts 17:25, 28), and yet he receives his actuality of knowledge from the creature in any respect, it seems that God creates and sustains blindly only to be subsequently illumined by his own production. He is the maker of he knows not what until an experience of his own handiwork actualizes knowledge in him. For those in the Judeo-Christian tradition, this runs afoul of biblical texts that stipulate God made all things with wisdom (Ps 104:24) and that nothing in his creation informs him in the way of knowledge or understanding (Isa 40:12–14). A passible Creator who is intellectually passive toward his own creation is, to some extent, a non-wise and ignorant Creator. He creates in the dark, so to speak.

Second, the critics' position also undermines God's self-sufficiency of being more generally and thus of his adequacy as the first cause of all things. This is because a passible God cannot be simple and purely actual, composed as he must be of principles of act and passive potency. Some critics of classical theism insist that simplicity is not required to ground God's self-sufficiency or aseity. Mullins, for example, writes, "Classical theists often claim that God's aseity and self-sufficiency entails that God is timeless, immutable, simple, and impassible. I cannot find any such systematic entailment from aseity and self-sufficiency to divine timeless, immutability, and simplicity" (Mullins 2018, p. 7). The reason Mullins fails to perceive the entailment from aseity is partly due to his attenuated conception of aseity and self-sufficiency. He holds that a being is *a se* and self-sufficient if it does not depend on or derive from anything *ad extra* (Mullins 2018, p. 8; Cf. Peckham 2019, p. 127). But this leaves entirely unexamined the ways in which a thing might be dependent upon *intrinsic* principles of being such as *esse*, form, matter, and so forth. No entity composed of such principles is identical with any one of them, and they are not identical to each other. As parts, these

principles function as intrinsic causes upon which the compound thing depends and with which it is not identical. A composite being depends on that which is not itself to be itself and thus is not *self*-sufficient. Its being is funded by principles really distinct from it, even if those principles do not themselves exist in a separated state from the being composed of them. For Mullins, that which is not God is in God making him to be. Such a being just is not the first principle of being or the absolute Creator to whom the Judeo-Christian tradition adheres.

In the end, Mullins is not even able to account for his attenuated notion of aseity since the intrinsic principles of which God is allegedly composed do not clearly fund their own unity in God and so an external agent will need to be invoked to account for the togetherness of God's parts. Some agent in act must act as unifier of parts that are, in themselves, only potentially unified. Failing to appeal to an external source of unity does not mean one is not required; it only means the critic is content with a unity for which no account can be given. Even appeals to the necessity of unity fall short since nothing about God or his alleged parts clearly grounds a necessary unity. If God can be really self-sufficient without that sufficiency requiring pure actuality, simplicity, and the like, then classical theism as a whole would appear to be a misguided project attempting to secure divine self-sufficiency by unnecessary means. The critics have not convincingly shown that such a self-sufficiency shorn of simplicity is realistically conceivable.

The more consistent passibilists correctly perceive their position to entail a deity that is in some important respects made to be by creatures and thus not perfectly self-sufficient for all that he is. Indeed, on the consistent passibilist account God's being is not entirely uncreated. Thomas Tracy states, "God can be said to be self-creative in the sense that he determines the content of his own existence. God, that is, freely prescribes the pattern of activity that constitutes his life" (1984, p. 126). Tracy extends this creative determination of God to the operations of his creatures as well: "God's continued existence cannot be dependent upon the actions of any other being unless he intends that it be … . We must not exclude the possibility that God may establish a relation to creatures in which he is genuinely affected by them and yet does not cease to be God" (1984, pp. 128–9). Thus, God voluntarily permits the creature a hand in causally determining his existence. God is both a determining agent and a determined patient. This places God, even if only voluntarily, in his creatures' debt for some actuality of his being. Charles Hartshorne regards this indebted and dependent God to be more noble than the classical theist alternative: "As we are indebted to a few persons for the privilege of feeling something of the quality of their experiences, so God is indebted to *all* persons for the much fuller enjoyment of the same privilege. God is not conceited or envious; therefore he has no motive for wishing to escape or deny this indebtedness" (1948, p. 47).

Hartshorne boldly traces out the implication of a passible deity to the conclusion that creatures must be contributors to God's being:

> If God permits us every privilege, but not that of enriching his life by contributing the unique quality of our own experience to the more inclusive quality of his, by virtue of his sympathetic interest in us, then he does less for us than the poorest of human creatures. What we ask above all is the chance to contribute to the being of others. This ultimate generosity of aspiration is stifled by the doctrine that in the supreme relation in which we stand it is only ourselves, not the other, that has anything to receive from the relation.
>
> (1948, p. 55)

This seems to some extent to animate all the critics of divine impassibility. If God gains nothing from the creature, then he is not meaningfully and significantly involved with the creature. Yet the cost of conceiving God as ensconced in some sort of mutualistic give-and-take with the creature in which the creature actualizes potential in him is too high. It forfeits the perfect self-sufficiency of God as the primary actualizer of all that comes to be.

Some passibilists are fully cognizant of this implication and embrace it unreservedly. Whitehead is outstanding in this regard. He speaks of the primordial God as "deficiently actual" in two ways: "His feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fulness of actuality. Secondly, conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms" (1978, p. 343). God in himself, apart from the causal influence of creation, possesses "neither fulness of being, nor consciousness" (1978, p. 344). God's primordial nature is augmented or complemented, according to Whitehead, by his consequent nature which is acquired through "the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts." His primordial nature is "actually deficient" and "unconscious." This deficiency of being and consciousness is correlated to his consequent nature that "originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world" (1978, 345). When this experience is integrated with God's primordial side it brings about the further completeness of his actuality of being. Whitehead carries this through to its conclusion in one of his most brazen declarations: "It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God. It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God" (1978, p. 348). God is the supremely passible being: "Each actuality in the temporal world has its reception into God's nature" (1978, p. 350). No doubt some of Whitehead's fellow passibilists, especially among evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics, will strongly demur to his stated conclusions. But it is not clear why their criticism of impassibility does not ultimately demand their subscription to a God who is made to be by the creature, a God who himself is created in some sense.

Regarding divine simplicity, Edward Feser observes, "From a classical theist perspective, to deny simplicity is implicitly to affirm atheism" (2017, p. 195). We could say the same with respect to the denial of divine impassibility. It leaves us without a first cause of being, which is an implicit sort of atheism. Thomas Aquinas spotlights the problem that arises when we say that God derives his knowledge of creatures from outside himself:

> Some, not being able by their own intellectual power to go beyond the manner of created knowledge, have believed that knowledge is in God like some sort of disposition added to His essence, as is the case with us. This is quite absurd and erroneous. For, if it were true, God would not be absolutely simple. There would be in Him a composition of substance and accident, and, further, God would not be His own act of existence [*esse*]; for, as Boethius says: "What exists can share in something else, but existence itself in no way shares in anything else." If God shared in knowledge as if it were a state added to His essence, He would not be His own act of existence, and, thus, He would have His origin from another who would be the cause of His existence. In short, He would not be God.
>
> <div align="right">(1952–54, q. 2, a. 1)</div>

If God is patient to the operation of another, he is not the first and perfectly sufficient cause of created being. This is the problem that lurks in all passibilist accounts of divine knowing. A passible deity is composed of parts and depends on what is not itself in order to be and so simply cannot be the first and absolutely sufficient reason for the world.

13.4 God's Impassible Knowledge

For all the liabilities of divine passibilism, the critics do raise several important questions that the classical theist needs to address. How can an impassible God perfectly know his creatures if he has no experience of them? How can he care for them if he is utterly unfeeling and unmovable? How can he be meaningfully involved with beings other than himself?

The short answer to these questions is that God knows all creatures and is involved with them as the absolute first cause of being. Aquinas states that "since God is the cause of things by His knowledge … His knowledge extends as far as His causality extends" (2012, I, q. 14 a. 11; Cf. Aquinas 1952–54, q. 2, a. 1; Blankenhorn 2016; Shanley 1997; 1998). His causality includes human states of mind and cognitional actuality. Aquinas writes, "just as God's being is prime and for this reason the cause of all being, so His understanding is prime and on this account the cause of all intellectual operation. Hence, just as God, by knowing His being knows the being of each thing, so by knowing His understanding and willing

He knows every thought and will [*omnem cogitationem et voluntatem*]"
(1955, I, c. 68). This means that the actuality of every particular *quale* in a
human's experiential knowledge falls within the scope of God's causality
and knowledge. These bits of *experientia* are known by the creature only
insofar as they are actual, and they are actual ultimately because God
makes them to be. God's light is what makes *qualia* knowable and illu-
mines them for us. He illumines all things by actualizing them but is not
illumined and actualized by his own handiwork in return, *pace* the claims
of the passibilists surveyed above. Aquinas unfolds this beautifully in his
Super Librum De Causis Expostio:

> [T]he first cause does not cease to illumine its effect, while it is not
> illumined by any other light because it is itself the pure light above
> which there is no light. To understand this we should realize that it is
> through corporeal light that we have sense knowledge of visible
> things. So we can speak metaphorically of that through which we
> know something, as if it were a light. Now the Philosopher proves in
> Book 9 of the *Metaphysics* that every single thing is known through
> that which is in act. Therefore, the very actuality of a thing is, in a
> certain way, its light. Since an effect is such that it is in act through
> its cause, it follows that it is illumined and known through its cause.
> The first cause, however, is pure act, having no admixture of
> potentiality. Therefore, it is itself pure light, by which all other
> things are illumined and rendered knowable.
>
> (1996, Prop. 6)

This is exactly contrary to the passibilists' reasoning about God's
knowledge. Rather than saying God's knowledge of our experiences is
actualized in him by us, Thomas says our knowledge of our experiences
is actualized in us by God who makes the objects of our knowledge to be
as well as the cognitional act by which we know those objects. God's
knowledge illumines all he makes; it is not illuminated by what he
makes. The lesser light does not add to the greater. If there is any light of
knowledge or cognition in our various *qualia*, it is kindled by God who
causes the actuality of our *qualia*—not just *what* we experience, but the
actuality of our experiencing knowledge. God is not on the outside of
our experiences looking in; rather, he is causally present in our experi-
ences making them knowable and cognizable to us. He is near to us as
pure agent, not as a patient.

 This has profound implications for the interiority and intimacy of
God's knowledge of us. His causal knowledge is not properly char-
acterized as experiential *or* propositional. While it may be true that a
human's first-person experience of *qualia* provides privileged cognitional
access, at least vis-à-vis other human knowers, God's causal knowledge
penetrates within us still more deeply and perfectly. He has a privilege of

access to our *qualia* that exceeds the depth even of our own self-acquaintance. Our experiences illumine our knowledge; but God illumines our experiences by giving to them the luminosity by which we know them.

Aquinas likens God's knowledge of the creature to that of an artist: "God's knowledge of created things may be compared to that which an artist has of his artistic products and which is their cause. Hence, the relation of God's knowledge to things known is the opposite of the relation of our knowledge to them. Our knowledge is received from things, and, by its nature, comes after them. But the Creator's knowledge of creatures, and the artist's of his products, by its very nature, precedes the things known" (1952–54, q. 2, a. 8). God's artistry extends even to the actuality of the mental life of his creatures. Thus, he knows all creaturely thoughts and volitions not by observation or experience, but by his own causal actualization of those operations in us.

This also pertains to the question of how God knows our pain. Brian Davies explains that God is nearer to us in our suffering than even the most sympathetic observer of our pain: "We can only be present to the sufferings of others as observers. We are not within them … . God is no observer of us as we suffer. He is in us making us to be. So he is with us in our suffering as nothing else is. He cannot, however, be this if he is also a victim of suffering" (2006, p. 168). If God knew our suffering via an experience of suffering, or even by a "copy" of our experience, then he would not be as immediately present to us as he is. He would have to stand apart from the actuality of our experience as an onlooker who could only know our pain in some secondary derivative sense, the same way humans know one another's pain. Herbert McCabe is surely correct in writing, "Whatever the consciousness of the creator may be, it cannot be that of an experiencer confronted by what he experiences … . [God] is more intimately involved with each creature than any other creature could be" (1987, pp. 45–46).

The divine empathic knowledge commended by the passibilists results in a divine knowledge that is *less* interior to the human experience than divine causal knowledge, not more. Causal knowledge is a non-experiential way of knowing creaturely experiences that understands those experiences more perfectly and exactly than the subjects of experience themselves (*pace* Sarot 1991, p. 92: "Consider one's knowledge of one's own experience … . God could not know it better than I do"). One might recall the Apostle John's words that God is greater than our heart and knows all things (1 Jn 3:20).

Classical theists can say God is "outside the whole order of creation" in that his being and life are not ordered to creatures as to depend on them in any way (Aquinas 2012, I, q. 13, a. 7). But this does not mean he is distant from the creature as the passibilists allege. Aquinas explains that,

> God is in all things … as an agent is present to that upon which it works. For an agent must be joined to that wherein it acts immediately and touch it by its power; hence it is proved in *Phys.* vii that the thing moved and the mover must be joined together. Now since God is very being [*ipsum esse*] by His own essence, created being [*esse creatum*] must be His proper effect … . Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being … . Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing … . Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermostly [*intime*].
>
> (2012, I, q. 8, a. 1)

God is immediately present to his creatures in all their experiences by his causal activity. If causal knowledge of experience is more penetrating and luminous than experiential knowledge of experience, then we cannot say that an impassible God is unable to care because he is unable to know. The opposite is true. God is able to care about and tend to the needs of his creatures because he knows their experiences more perfectly than they do. He is the one actualizing those experiences and thereby making them knowable to the creature. The God who makes all things by the immediate operation of his divine nature cannot but be the one who is *most* involved with us and our experiences (see Dodds 2020, pp. 96–99).

Nothing about God's unfeelingness locks him out of concern for us. It is precisely because he is passionless that he cares for and loves his creature so perfectly. Passionate concern is less perfect because it requires the subject to have his care and concern actualized in him by a mediating empathic experience. God's knowledge is not mediated to him via an experience he undergoes, but rather is the immediate illuminating cause of all that is. His love is not a love stirred up in him by the creature, but rather is that which bestows all good upon the creature (see Aquinas 2012, I, q. 20, a. 2). This is an attunement to reality that exceeds all discovering, observation, and experience. It would be more accurate to say that the reality of the world is attuned to God's knowledge than to say God's knowledge is attuned to the world's reality.

13.5 Conclusion

This brings us full circle to the central concern of classical theism, to maintain God's identity as *prima causa*. It certainly means God cannot acquire knowledge via experiences. But far from rendering him less knowledgeable, this is precisely what clears the way for his superabundant

perfection of knowledge. As first cause, he simply does not need to be moved from a state of not-knowing and not-caring to knowing and caring. So perfectly and immediately involved is he with every dynamic of creaturely actuality, including all *qualia*, that he could not possibly be brought nearer by experience. As a route to acquiring knowledge and concern, experience is only helpful to those beings that first lack knowledge and concern. The purely actual first cause has no such lack. So long as it is considered as a causal knowledge, divine omniscience offers no motivation for abandoning divine impassibility.

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14 Classical Theism and Divine Action

Michael J. Dodds

The God of classical theism not only creates the world but is also immanently present and active in it through his providential care. When we say, "God acts in the world," we mean God *does* something or *causes* something. To talk about divine action, therefore, we need a language of causality. A broad, nuanced understanding of causality will support a rich conversation about God's action. If our notion of causality becomes constricted, however, so will our discussion of divine action. This is what happened in the wake of modern science.

The philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas provided a broad notion of causality, but the concept narrowed with the coming of modern science. Newtonian science followed a mathematical method and so tended to ignore all aspects of reality that could not be quantified. Causes that were not measurable seemed to have no place in the natural world. In today's science, however, the notion of causality seems to be expanding. New discoveries have led to new ways of conceiving causality that are remarkably reminiscent of Aristotle and Aquinas. Retrieving their understanding may therefore be helpful for both science and theology. We will begin with a brief review of the broad Aristotelian notion of causality and then follow its fortunes through modern and contemporary science. We will then consider how the scientific understanding of causality has affected the discussion of divine action and how the retrieval of Aristotle and Aquinas can further that discussion.

14.1 The Notion of Causality in Aristotle and Aquinas

Classical theism is founded on scripture but also incorporates philosophical insights as it seeks to understand God's revelation. As Brian Davies explains, classical theists see their theology as "a natural way of expressing what the Bible teaches concerning God's nature. But classical theism also derives from reading the Bible in the light of various philosophical positions. In this sense, it is also the product of philosophical reasoning and argument" (Davies 2004, pp. 14–15). Davies echoes the teaching of Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*: "Sacred doctrine

makes use … of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason … . Nevertheless, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities as extrinsic and probable arguments; but properly uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures as an incontrovertible proof" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.1.8. ad 2).

The notion of causality is one of the things theology borrows from philosophy. The philosophical discussion of causality began with the Presocratics who sought to discover the most fundamental stuff of the cosmos, the matter of which all things are composed. Candidates included water, air, and fire (Nahm 1964, pp. 31–77). Plato noticed the inadequacy of these early accounts. Matter alone could not explain all things since matter was fundamentally unknowable. Ever in flux, material things were not stable enough to be objects of abiding knowledge. Plato accordingly viewed them as mere shadows of an unchanging realm of forms or ideas that are truly knowable.

Aristotle argued that matter and form alone could not give an adequate account of nature. He expanded the notion of causality to include efficient and final causes. He also disagreed with Plato on the nature of formal causality, seeing forms not as external ideas or exemplars, but as intrinsic, intelligible principles of material substances. The formal cause explains why any substance exists as a particular kind of thing, and the material cause accounts for the possibility of its ceasing to be what it is and becoming something else. The efficient cause is the agent of change, like the builder who makes a house. The final cause is the purpose or aim in view of which something is done, as a house might be made for shelter (Aristotle 1941, *Physics* 2.3 [194b 23–35]).

Aquinas adopted Aristotle's account of the four fundamental causes. As he says: "Every cause is either matter, or form, or agent, or end" (Aquinas 1956, *SCG* 3.10 no. 5). In the realm of formal causality, however, he found a place for Plato's exemplar causes (Boland 1996). He viewed these not as subsistent forms but ideas in the mind of God: "In the divine wisdom are the types of all things, which types we have called ideas—i.e., exemplar forms existing in the divine mind" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.44.3. co.).

The hallmark of causality is ontological dependence: "Those things upon which others depend for their being or becoming are called causes (Aquinas 1963, *Commentary* 1.1 no. 5). Since dependence takes many forms, causality is an analogical idea having various senses. Matter is a cause, but so are ideas in the mind of God. The sculptor is the cause of a statue, but so is its shape or form and the purpose for which it is created. All four types of causes involve dependence, but in different ways (Aquinas 1952, *Power* 5.1. co.). Each material substance depends on its material and formal causes as intrinsic to its nature, and every instance of change requires some efficient and final cause. As Ignacio Silva explains: "This kind of causality as dependence opens the path to understanding

causality as an analogical notion, where many different kinds of causality allow for several ways in which one thing can depend upon another for its being or change" (Silva 2016, p. 161).

In Aristotle's philosophy, causality explains two things: first, why something is what it is; and second, why it can change and become something else. As intrinsic causes, matter and form account for why something is what it is. Michelangelo's Pietà, for instance, is what it is (a marble statue) since it is made out of marble (material cause) and has a particular shape (formal cause). On a deeper level, the marble itself is what it is (a particular substance) because of its intrinsic matter (material cause) and form (formal cause). To understand this deeper level, it will be helpful to consider the basic kinds of change: accidental and substantial.

In accidental change, a thing remains what it is as it endures through the change and undergoes some incidental modification (as marble remains marble when it acquires the shape of a statue). In substantial change, a thing or substance does not itself endure through the change. As Vincent Edward Smith explains: "In substantial change, a whole mobile or material being is changed into another mobile being; in accidental change, a material thing remains essentially what it was but is changed according to some modification like quality, quantity, or place …. In substantial change, a whole thing changes, whereas in accidental change the thing in question remains itself and simply takes on a new attribute" (Smith 1958, p. 78).

In substantial change, the original substance is corrupted, and a single new substance (or group of new substances) is generated. When a dog dies, for instance, it ceases to be, and a "carcass" (a collection of various substances breaking down into more basic elements) is generated. This is not a mere accidental change, but neither is it the annihilation of the original substance and the creation of a new substance. As Leo Elders explains:

> "Aristotle gave careful consideration to the generation and corruption of physical things: we see certain substances become other things. Semen and ovulum melt together and turn into a new organism; iron rusts, timber burns and man becomes a corpse … . The new substance is made out of the previous thing, but its essence is not the same. Nothing of man's being is left in a corpse which is just an assemblage of chemical compounds, derived from the human being which preceded it … . Apparently Aristotle argued as follows: one thing becomes another thing. This means that such a substantial change is not a total disappearance of A into nothingness and the origin from nothingness of B. B comes into being from A, and from nothing nothing comes forth."
>
> (Elders 1997, p. 48)

In accidental change, the subject that endures through the change is some substance (called "secondary matter"), as clay endures through the change when a clay block is shaped into a statue. In substantial change, the subject that endures through the change cannot be the substance since the original substance is corrupted. Aristotle argued that the subject that endures through substantial change is not a substance, but the mere possibility or potency for being a material substance. Aristotle calls this principle of mere possibility-of-being, "primary matter (*prōtē hulē*)" (Aristotle 1941, *Physics* 2.1 [193a 29]). In substantial change, a new substance is generated when a new substantial form is educed from the potency of primary matter.

Primary matter is not itself a *thing*. It is rather the mere possibility of being a thing. It cannot exist by itself but exists only with some substantial form as some particular substance. Together with substantial form, however, it is a real constituent principle of material things. The substantial form actualizes this principle of possibility-of-being, and together they constitute the existing substance. So, each substance is composed of primary matter and substantial form—the form accounting for the particular kind of substance that it is (dog or cat) and the matter accounting for the fact that it can cease to be what it is and become something else (Luyten 1965). In making the substance to be the kind of substance that it is, the substantial form also accounts for the particular structure and characteristic activities of the substance (such as a dog's having four legs, a tail, and a propensity to bark).

The substantial form is an intrinsic formal principle, but formal causality may also be considered more broadly to include the exemplar formal cause as an extrinsic principle. An artist, for instance, may have an idea of the shape or accidental form she wants to give to the clay that she is sculpting. That idea is the exemplar formal cause of the statue. We have noted that Aquinas applies this analogously to the divine ideas of all created reality: "In the divine wisdom are the types of all things, which types we have called ideas—i.e., exemplar forms existing in the divine mind" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.44.3. co.).

To complete the account of how one thing becomes another, we must consider efficient and final causality. We tend to think of the efficient cause first when we talk about causes. The efficient cause is the agent that makes something happen. Such agency, however, is taken in a very broad sense. The art student who shapes the marble is the efficient cause of the statue, but so is the teacher who directs her, the one who, as Aristotle says, "gave advice" (Aristotle 1941, *Physics* 2.3 [194b 30]). Final causality is also required since an agent does not act except in view of some end or purpose (the final cause). The art student, for instance, might make the statue in order to graduate. The final cause, as a good to be attained, moves the agent to act. Aristotle and Aquinas considered the final cause to be operative not just in intelligent beings, but throughout the natural world,

even in inanimate things (Aristotle 1941, *Physics* 2.8 [199b 16–18]); Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.2.3. co); Lang 1998, pp. 274–75; Witt 1989, pp. 85–86). As the principle that moves the agent to act, the final cause is the foundation of all causality (Aquinas 1965, *Principles* 4. no. 24).

The notion of *action* is ascribed not only to the efficient cause but also to formal and final causes: "A thing is said to act (*agere*) in a threefold sense. In one way formally, as when we say that whiteness makes white; … In another sense a thing is said to act effectively, as when a painter makes a wall white. Thirdly, it is said in the sense of the final cause, as the end is said to effect by moving the efficient cause" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.48.1 ad 4). For Aquinas, to act means "to make something to be in act" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.115.1 co.). This can happen in various ways. When an artist (efficient cause) shapes a lump of clay into a ball, she makes it actually round. But the accidental form of "roundness" (formal cause) also makes the clay round. For all her pushing and pulling, the artist's clay will not be round until it possesses that particular shape. The end or purpose (final cause) also "acts" on the agent or "moves" the agent to act. If the artist is being paid, for instance, money (as a good to be attained) also induces her to act. Efficient, formal, and final causes all "act" in the process of change, but each acts in a distinctive way.

The different types of causality are not always quantifiable. The action of the efficient cause, for instance, may sometimes be quantified in terms of measurable force. The activity of the art student, for example, may be described in terms of how many pounds of pressure per square inch she applies to the clay. The efficient causality of her adviser, however, cannot be represented quantitatively.

Formal and final causality can never be described as a quantitative force. While the formal cause acts on the clay to make it round, it exerts no force. Rather, it acts according to the mode of formal causality by making something (in this case the roundness of the clay sphere) to be actual. Its action is quite different from that of efficient causality, especially the type of efficient causality known as "force". The final cause also acts on the agent to influence or induce it to act, but again this implies no quantitative force. Rather, it acts according to the mode of final causality, as an end or good that induces the efficient cause to act. Final causality cannot be reduced to efficient causality, much less to that mode of efficient causality that might be called "force."

14.2 The Fortunes of Causality in Modern and Contemporary Science

The classical understanding of causality disappeared with the coming of modern science which had no place for causes that could not be quantified. Formal and final causes were simply ignored, and the material cause was no longer conceived as pure potentiality but as the fundamental, measurable

"stuff" of the universe (the atoms). James Dolezal notes: "The mechanistic physics of the early Enlightenment tended to disregard the traditional categories of formal and final causation, thus eclipsing a vast portion of what earlier generations would have understood causation to involve" (Dolezal 2017, p. 61). As Mario Bunge summarizes: "The Aristotelian teaching of causes lasted in the official Western culture until the Renaissance. When modern science was born, formal and final causes were left aside as standing beyond the reach of the experiment; and material causes were taken for granted in connection with all natural happenings ... Hence, of the four Aristotelian causes only the efficient cause was regarded as worthy of scientific research" (Bunge 1979, p. 32).

Efficient causality itself was reduced simply to the force or energy that moves the atoms (Burtt 1954, pp. 30, 98–99, 208–209). With David Hume, even this narrow idea of efficient causality was questioned. Since the supposed influence of cause on effect was not directly observable, Hume concluded that causation was merely a habit of our thinking as we get used to seeing one thing constantly conjoined to another (Hume 2000, pp. 37, 59, 70–73). Causality became a property of thought and not of things. No longer an *ontological* reality in the world, it became an *epistemological* property of our way of thinking about the world. The hallmark of causality shifted from the ontological category of *dependence* to the epistemological category of *predictability*. The world was seen as a deterministic realm, governed by inexorable laws that allowed no room for outside causes. It was best studied by a reductionistic method that explained all phenomena in terms of their most fundamental components.

With the discoveries of contemporary science, new ways of understanding causality have emerged that are redolent of Aristotle and Aquinas (Wallace 1996; Watkins 2019, pp. 23–24; Koons, Simpson, and Teh (2017), and Koons 2018 and 2021). We can see this in the theories of quantum mechanics, emergence, Big Bang cosmology, and contemporary biology. Quantum theory (at least in the Copenhagen interpretation) has affirmed a world of spontaneity with a fundamental indeterminism as the foundation of material reality. So John Polkinghorne argues:

> Those of a realist cast of mind will tend to correlate epistemology closely with ontology, believing that what we know, or what we cannot know, is a reliable guide to what is the case. If this metascientific strategy is followed, unpredictability will be seen as the sign of a degree of causal openness in physical process. In the case of quantum theory, this is indeed the line that has been followed by the majority of physicists, who join with Bohr in interpreting Heisenberg's uncertainty principle as an ontological principle of indeterminism and not merely an epistemological principle of ignorance in the way that Bohm suggests.
>
> (Polkinghorne 2006, p. 979)

Such indeterminacy brings to mind Aristotle's material cause—not the actual, measurable "stuff" of Newtonian science, but a principle of sheer possibility. Werner Heisenberg himself noted this analogy: "If we compare this situation with the Aristotelian concepts of matter and form, we can say that the matter of Aristotle, which is mere 'potentia', should be compared to our concept of energy, which gets into 'actuality' by means of the form, when the elementary particle is created (Heisenberg 1958, p. 160).

The theory of emergence maintains that, at many levels in the natural world, new features arise that cannot be explained simply by reference to their parts (Clayton 2006, pp. 66–69; Tabaczek 2013; 2019). Their study requires us to begin with the whole (from the top down) rather than the part (from the bottom up). There are, for instance, "several features of the present-day theory of elementary particles" which suggest that "at certain levels of complexity, matter exhibits 'emergent properties' and 'emergent laws' which can neither be defined nor explained in terms of the properties and laws at a lower level of complexity" (Powers 1982, p. 155). The phenomenon of emergence is especially evident in biological evolution (Clayton 2006, pp. 73–101). As John Polkinghorne points out: "Subatomic particles are not only not 'more real' than a bacterial cell; they also have no greater privileged share in determining the nature of reality" (Polkinghorne 1991, p. 39). The "bottom-up" method of reductionism no longer seems adequate for explaining the phenomena that science presently observes. The move away from reductionism to the "top down" causality of the whole invites a reconsideration of Aristotle's notion of substantial form as an intrinsic principle that makes the whole substance to be what it is.

Big Bang cosmology reveals the contingencies involved in the initial formation of the universe. If any one of the myriad variables had been slightly different, a universe capable of producing and sustaining human life might never have developed. To explain the fortuitous convergence of such contingencies, some scientists have suggested an "anthropic principle." This introduces human beings into the equation (Bartholomew 2008, pp. 82–85). Somehow the "wherefrom" of the universe in the interrelation of initial forces is intricately related to its "whereto" in the eventual emergence of human life. Consideration of nature's "whereto" invites a reconsideration of purpose (Aristotle's final cause) as a category of explanation in the natural world.

Contemporary biology has also embraced the notion of purpose or final causality. As Francisco Ayala explains: "Biologists need to account for the functional features of organisms, their 'design,' in terms of the goals or purposes they serve, which they do by teleological hypotheses or teleological explanations" (Ayala 2008, p. 84). Ayala maintains that "teleological explanations in biology are not only acceptable but indeed indispensable" (Ayala 1998, p. 44).

Primary matter, substantial form, and teleology are all modes of causality that are not measurable and so cannot come directly under the scientific microscope. What is studied and discovered in science, however, now seems to invite (or possibly to require) their consideration as categories of explanation (Wallace 1996).

14.3 Modern Science and Divine Action

The narrowing of the notion of causality limited our ability to speak of God's action. As Mariusz Tabaczek notes: "[T]he revival of atomism and the reduction of the rich Aristotelian notion of causal dependencies in nature to the realm of physical interactions—the effects of which are quantifiable and can be expressed in the language of mathematics— could not but significantly influence theology, and our understanding of divine action in particular" (Tabaczek 2021, p. 2). Philip Clayton maintains: "The present-day crisis in the notion of divine action has resulted as much as anything from a shift in the notion of causation" (Clayton 1997, p. 189). Keith Ward explains: "The scientific world-view seems to leave no room for God to act, since everything that happens is determined by scientific laws" (Ward 1990, p. 1). Langdon Gilkey avers: "[C]ontemporary theology does not expect, nor does it speak of, wondrous divine events on the surface of natural and historical life. The causal nexus in space and time which Enlightenment science and philosophy introduced into the Western mind … is also assumed by modern theologians and scholars" (Gilkey 1983, p. 31). Albert Einstein proposes a similar argument: "The more a man is imbued with the ordered regularity of all events, the firmer becomes his conviction that there is no room left by the side of this ordered regularity for causes of a different nature. For him, neither the rule of human, nor the rule of divine will, exists as an independent cause of natural events" (Einstein 1950, p. 32). Oliver Wiertz asserts:

> According to many modern academics, the success of science has made the theistic worldview not only superfluous but hard to believe. Not only does the modern world seem to lack any role for a divine creator, but science appears to have positively discredited the foundational theistic belief that the world contains any special divine agency. Hand in hand with the success of modern science, we have the rise of methodological naturalism, according to which the scientific method is the only reliable means, or at last the most privileged means, of assessing reality. Methodological naturalism is often connected with the ontologically naturalistic thesis that all that exists is what can (in principle) be discovered, described and explained with the methods of modern science.
>
> (Wiertz 2016, p. 49)

The conviction that empirical science alone is capable of investigating reality is not a conclusion of science, but a premise of the ideology known as "scientism" (Słomka 2021, pp. 142–44; Haak 2003; Dodds 2012, pp. 51–52, 95, 249–50).

If causality itself consists only of physical force, then divine causality must also be a kind of physical force. But when God's action is conceived as one physical force among others, it inevitably appears to interfere with them and with the determined laws of science that describe them. Gordon Kaufman accordingly asks how God can act in the world without "violently ripping into the fabric of history or arbitrarily upsetting the momentum of its powers" (Kaufman 1972, p. 147).

If there is only one, univocal sort of causality, we must assume that God also employs it. With this assumption, however, we make God into just one more univocal cause acting alongside of others. When two univocal causes are involved in the same action, however, the causality of one inevitably interferes with that of the other. If two people carry a table, for instance, each lifts only part of the total load. The more weight one hefts, the less there is for the other. If one hoists the whole burden, the other is left with nothing to do. Similarly, if we think of God as a cause like any other in the world, God's causality must interfere with that of creatures. An omnipotent God would then necessarily rob all creatures of their proper causality. Accepting such premises, some theologians have concluded that God's power must be limited if creatures are to retain any causality of their own.

From the beginning of modern science, any theology that viewed God's causality univocally has tended to depart from classical theism by limiting God's power in some way. Deism, for instance, limits God's action to the moment of creation. God did indeed make the world but is no longer needed to explain its continued existence and activity. Some liberal theologians allow that God can act in the world in some way, but deny that he is able to act outside the limits of the laws of nature. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for instance, argues that "as regards the miraculous, the general interests of science, more particularly of natural science, and the interests of religion seem to meet at the same point, i.e., that we should abandon the idea of the absolutely supernatural" (Schleiermacher 1960, p. 183). Rudolf Bultmann maintains that God should not be seen as a cause "which intervenes between the natural, or historical, or psychological course of events." Events in nature are "so linked by cause and effect" as to leave "no room for God's working" (Bultmann 1983, pp. 61, 64). As Craig Bartholomew summarizes: "A common tendency in modernity has been to see its naturalistic, scientistic worldview as true and superior to theistic worldviews, with the divine element in the latter as *mythical*, and in need of demythologization" (Bartholomew 2020, p. 178).

To avoid divine interference, some theologians maintain that God's knowledge and power must be limited. Maurice Wiles, for instance,

thinks that "God's creation of our world necessarily implies a divine self-limitation in relation to traditional understandings of omnipotence and omniscience" (Wiles 1986, p. 80). Arthur Peacocke argues that "God's omniscience and omnipotence must be regarded, in some respects, as 'self-limited'" (Peacocke 1993, p. 155). John Polkinghorne maintains that the presence of chance in the world requires a limitation of divine power: "God chose a world in which chance has a role to play, thereby … accepting limitation of his power to control" (Polkinghorne 1989a, p. 63). Brian Hebblethwaite explains that to make room for human freedom, God must limit his knowledge and power:

> Creation is an act of God's omnipotence, but in order to relate himself to the creatures he has made, he must limit himself in a manner appropriate to the nature of what he has made, in the case we are considering, free finite persons … . God's omniscience, like his omnipotence, is self-limited by the nature of what he has made. In each case the limitation is logical, given the actual nature of God's creation. He cannot determine the future precisely without destroying his creatures' freedom. He cannot know the future precisely, if his creatures are indeed free.
>
> (Hebblethwaite 1979, pp. 440–41)

Such divine limitation is antithetical to classical theism. Versions of it may be found in theologies that Brian Davies dubs "theistic personalism" and James Dolezal calls "theistic mutualism" (Davies 2004, pp. 9–14; Dolezal 2017, pp. 1–8). God's action must be conceived as limited if it would otherwise interfere with the causality of creatures and the nexus of scientific laws. And it will seem to entail such interference so long as it is conceived as univocal with the causality of creatures. But there will be no other way to think of it if causality itself is reduced to a univocal notion.

14.4 Contemporary Science and Divine Action

Contemporary science suggests a much broader understanding of causality that opens new ways for speaking of divine action. There are two fundamental options. One is to employ the new discoveries of science themselves in the discussion of divine action. The second is to use not so much the discoveries as the expanded notion of causality that they imply (Dodds 2012; Tabaczek 2021; Balsas 2017, pp. 123–60).

Some theologians employ the discoveries of science themselves in their discussion of divine action. Robert Russell, for instance, uses the indeterminism of quantum mechanics to show how God might act in the world, yet not interfere with natural causes. He argues that "we can view

God as acting in particular quantum events to produce, indirectly, a specific event at the macroscopic level, one which we call an event of special providence … . [Q]uantum mechanics allows us to think of special divine action without God overriding or intervening in the structures of nature" (Russell 1998, pp. 89, 94).

Employing another development in science, John Polkinghorne suggests that the openness of chaos theory may be understood in a way that leaves "room for divine maneuver" (Polkinghorne 1989b, p. 31; Polkinghorne 2006, p. 979). Other theologians have utilized the anthropic principle to affirm that divine design is involved in arranging the initial conditions of the universe so that it would be a place suitable for human life (David Bartholomew 1984: 31–32, 64).

Despite their creative use of the discoveries of contemporary science, such theologians tend to employ a univocal notion of causality. Their very efforts to locate divine action within the spaces that have become available in quantum or chaos theories suggest that they are still using a univocal understanding of causality in which, unless carefully positioned, divine action always seems liable to interfere with the causality of creatures.

Contemporary developments in science invite us to move beyond such univocal thinking. Science itself seems to be reaching beyond univocal causality towards a multifaceted account of material, formal, efficient, and final causes in nature. Employing that wider notion of causality invites a return to classical theism in the discussion of divine action.

14.5 Classical Theism and Divine Action

In speaking of God's action, classical theism begins with the simplicity of divine being. While the being of any creature always involves some sort of composition, God's being is utterly one and simple. This means that any quality we attribute to God must be one with God's being. As Aquinas says, "Whatever exists in God is God" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.27.3 ad 2). If so, then God's action is also one with God's being. As Aquinas teaches: "God's action is his being (*Suum agere est suum esse*)" (Aquinas 1956, *SCG* 2.9. nos 4–5). If nothing else, this tells us that God's action is not like ours. The action of every creature is always distinct from its being. A duck is not just a quack, and a dog is not just a bark, but the action of God is simply God.

Although God's action is in no way like that of creatures, classical theism maintains that the actions of creatures are always in some way like God. As Aquinas says: "Although it may be admitted that creatures are in some sort like God, it must nowise be admitted that God is like creatures" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* I, 4, 3, ad 4). Since God is the cause of the being and action of creatures and since every effect is in some way like its cause, we can speak of divine action analogously (as we speak of other

divine attributes), using words that are normally applied to creatures (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.12.12; 1.13.5; Rocca 2004; McInerny 1996).

A rich vocabulary and conceptual framework for speaking of divine action analogously is available in the notions of formal, efficient, and final causality. We have already seen how developments in contemporary science point to these kinds of causes. We can now use them to discuss God's actions.

God is the final cause of each creature. Since every action of the creature is for the sake of some real or apparent good, and each thing is good only insofar as it participates in a likeness to the Supreme Good, who is God, "it follows that God himself is the cause of every operation as its end" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.105.5. co.). As a final cause, God is intimately involved in every action of every creature. God does not interfere with such action, but is rather its source, since the creature would not act at all unless (in some way) it were moved by some good to be attained through its action.

God is the exemplar formal cause of all things. As the idea or exemplar in the mind of an artist is the source of her art, so God, as "the first exemplar cause of all things," is the cause of all creatures (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.44.3. co). As the creative idea of the artist does not interfere with her art but is rather its origin, so God, as the exemplar cause, does not interfere with the world of creatures but is its source.

God is also the first efficient cause of all things. We must not understand this causality in the narrow sense of Newtonian physics. God's action is not a mathematically describable force that moves the atoms. God's efficient causality is rather manifest most profoundly in instantiating each creature in being (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.3.4. co.; 1.44.1. co.). Since being is the innermost actuality of each creature, God is most intimately present to each creature through this action. As Aquinas says: "Being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent … . Hence, it must be that God is in all things and innermostly" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.8.1. co.).

God's efficient causality is also manifest in the action of creatures. Insofar as such action entails being and perfection, it is fully from God and fully from the creature. As Aquinas says: "It is apparent that the same effect is not attributed to a natural cause and to divine power in such a way that it is partly done by God and partly by the natural agent; rather, it is wholly done by both, but in different ways" (Aquinas 1956, *SCG* 3.70 no. 8). God does not act in the world as one univocal cause among others (as one more table-carrier). God is the ultimate transcendent cause, whose action does not diminish the contingency or freedom of the creature, but is rather its source:

> The divine will must be understood as existing outside of the order of beings, as a cause producing the whole of being and all its differences. Now the possible and the necessary are differences of being, and

therefore necessity and contingency in things and the distinction of each according to the nature of their proximate causes originate from the divine will itself, for He disposes necessary causes for the effect that He wills to be necessary, and He ordains causes acting contingently (i.e., able to fail) for the effects that He wills to be contingent. And according to the condition of these causes, effects are called either necessary or contingent, although all depend on the divine will as on a first cause, which transcends the order of necessity and contingency.

(Aquinas 1962: *Commentary* 1.14. no. 22)

Far from depriving creatures of their proper causality, God endows them with it. As Aquinas says: "God not only gives things their form, but he also preserves them in existence, and applies them to act, and is moreover the end of every action" (Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.105.5 ad 3). No action of God in nature should be viewed as meddling or interference. Properly understood, it should not even be seen as "intervention." As Brian Davies explains: "The notion of intervention involves the idea of absence followed by presence … . God is always present to his creatures as their sustainer and preserver. And if God is that, then it makes sense to deny that he can intervene in the world" (Davies 2004, p. 239). Even when God performs miracles, causing events that are beyond the capacity of creatures, his action cannot be said to disturb the worldly order, since the most profound order of the world is its ordering towards God:

If therefore we consider the order of things depending on the first cause, God cannot do anything against this order; for if he did so, he would act against his foreknowledge, or his will or his goodness. But if we consider the order of things depending on any secondary cause, thus God can do something outside such order; for he is not subject to the order of secondary causes, but on the contrary this order is subject to him as proceeding from him not by a natural necessity, but by the choice of his own will; for he could have created another order of things. Wherefore God can do something outside this order when he chooses, for instance by producing the effects of secondary causes without them or by producing certain effects to which secondary causes do not extend.

(Aquinas 1946, *ST* 1.105.6. co.)

14.6 Conclusion

Our understanding of causality has been deeply influenced by empirical science, and so in turn has our conception of divine action. When the richly nuanced account of causality in Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy was reduced in modern Newtonian science to the force that

moves the atoms, the theological account of divine action was confined by that narrow understanding of causality. In contemporary science, however, through the influence of quantum mechanics, emergence, biology, and Big Bang cosmology, the notion of causality has once again been broadened. This larger vision of causality evokes the notion of causality in Aristotle and Aquinas and invites its retrieval.

The reduction of causality in modern science diminished the ways that theology could speak of divine action. It soon seemed there was simply no "room" for God to act in the world without interfering with the causality of creatures. The expansion of causality in contemporary science opens new possibilities for speaking of divine action in ways that allow us to affirm such traditional principles of classical theism as the transcendent causality of God, his immanence in creation, and the authentic causality of creatures.

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15 Classical Theism, Divine Beauty, and the Doctrine of the Trinity

Mark K. Spencer

At first glance, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and classical theism seem incompatible. In Trinitarian doctrine, multiple divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are distinct but "consubstantial," having just one nature, power, activity, and will; they are not really identical to one another, but they are really identical to the divine substance or nature (Denzinger 2012, n.125, pp. 542, 804–805). In classical theism, there exists a God Who is a single ultimate cause and explanation of all things distinct from itself, and Who is eternal, simple, and absolutely perfect, including having perfections belonging only to persons (like intelligence and moral goodness). To be eternal is, minimally, to not be subject to change over time. To be simple is, minimally, to not be composed of parts, and to not participate in or instantiate any properties or principles, where those parts, properties, or principles would be explanatorily or causally prior to the simple being. (For one thing to be prior to another is for the former to be the source of the latter's being (that is, perfection or actuality), where they are also distinct in being.) If God is simple, then it seems to follow that God is *really identical* to anything ascribable to God. But then it seems that each divine person must be strictly identical to God. If Father and Son are really identical to the divine nature, then it would seem to follow, by transitivity of identity, that Father and Son are strictly identical to each other. That, however, is contrary to Trinitarian doctrine. Hence, Trinitarianism and classical theism seem incompatible (Richards 2003, p. 229; McCall and Rea 2009, p. 1; Hasker 2013, pp. 55–60; Mullins 2013, p. 199; Pawl 2020).

Some have defended their compatibility with a logic on which identity is relative to kindhood. The persons are identical *qua* God to each other, but not identical *qua* person; this blocks the objection based on transitivity of identity (van Inwagen 2009; Baber 2015; Jedwab 2015). Others have distinguished numerical identity from strict sameness: the persons are *numerically* identical, but not *strictly* the same (Brower and Rea 2009). Still others have reconciled them using a metaphysics on which one substance can be identical to multiple relations, but relations that are opposites are really distinct from each other. A substance is a being in

itself; a relation is a being as referred to another. For example, a road between two cities is substantially one, but going in one direction the road relates the cities by the "uphill relation," while in the other direction it relates them by the "downhill" relation. Substantially, the relations are just the one road, but as relations they really differ because they are opposites. Similarly, the Father and the Son are the "begetting" and the "being begotten" relations; as opposites, they really differ. Thus, they are not identical in the strict sense that allows for transitivity. On this view, strict identity requires two things to be not just really identical (that is, the same being), but require them to also be the same conceptually (Denzinger 2012, n.1330; Thomas Aquinas 1888, q.28; Thomas Aquinas 1954, bk.3, lect.5; Emery 2007, pp. 84–95, 115–141; Koons 2018).

My account of how to reconcile classical theism and Trinitarianism is meant to be consistent with these solutions. But I take a different approach and show that not only are they compatible, but that an excellent motivation—the perception of beauty—for holding classical theism is also a motivation for holding that God is at least three persons. Both views can be defended on the basis of conciliar interpretations of Scripture, and classical theism is also supported through causal and perfect being arguments. But one is only inclined to accept such reasoning if one has had experiences that yield a view of reality congenial to it. Some perceptions of reality make it more plausible to interpret Scripture in a Trinitarian way, rather than, say, an Arian or Sabellian way, or to hold classical theism, rather than, say, process theology or physicalism. It is helpful sometimes to return to the basis of views in direct experiences of reality, and that is what I propose to do here.

The experience of beauty that can motivate Trinitarianism and classical theism has been described throughout the Christian and wider classical traditions, and in recent theological aesthetics, which use the perception of beauty as a basis for natural theology (Viladesau 1999, p. 104). While this chapter is not a work of historical or textual interpretation, my method is to convey the experience in question by summarizing descriptions from the tradition; I do not so much argue for my account of beauty, as present it as one way that reality has appeared to many people. In the experience of beauty, some features of reality directly appear; one can also reason, in an effect-to-cause manner, from what is given in this experience to other features of reality that explain it. ('Experience' indicates any conscious act or anything that is explicitly or implicitly given to one consciously.) By considering both what is directly given in perceiving beauty and what we can reason to from this experience, a metaphysics can be built on its basis. I explain how a classical and multi-person God both appears in, and can be reasoned to on the basis of, the traditionally described experience of perceiving beauty. You can check these descriptions of experience against your own experience.

But even if they do not match your experience, these descriptions still reveal one motivation someone might have for holding classical theism and Trinitarianism. They thereby show that there is at least one experientially grounded metaphysics on which these doctrines are compatible. I begin by considering some experiences of beauty and presenting a metaphysics based on those experiences. (I have further developed this account in Spencer 2018, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021, 2022.) I then explain a view of God that can be grounded in this account. Finally, I explain which versions of Trinitarianism this evidence allows and which it excludes.

15.1 Experiences of Beauty

Many classical thinkers have described how, in each act of intellectually cognizing some real being, it always gives itself to us in certain ways. These ways that each being gives itself are sometimes called *transcendentals* or *properties of being*. (This and the following two paragraphs are based on Thomas Aquinas 1970, q.1, a.1, but the same or similar principles are affirmed by many others in the classical tradition; see Aertsen 2012.) Each of these is directly given in intellectual experience, and so, the method outlined above has a place in a metaphysics derived from this experience. We are at least implicitly aware of transcendentals whenever we engage in intellectual cognition, even if we do not explicitly attend to them; by reflecting on any intellectual act, we can discover the transcendentals given in it. Through this reflection, we can discover an experience that reveals that each being is beautiful.

In any intellectual experience, we are fundamentally aware that something exists (Maritain Phelan 1995, pp. 80–85). Whatever appears, appears as a being (*ens*), that is, as existing, even if we do not articulate it in those terms. To appear as a being is to appear as actual or perfect—that is, as having definite, complete features, rather than merely potentially having them—as acting, at least in manifesting or giving itself, and as having some value (Thomas Aquinas 1888, q.4, a.1). We can also grasp each being as a definite reality (*res*) of some kind, as having some nature. We might not grasp *what* its nature is or the exact kind to which it belongs, but we can always, upon reflection, be aware *that* it must have some nature. Something about each being, which we can call its nature (*essentia*, *ousia*), answers the questions of what it is, why it is of some kind, and why it can act or self-manifest in the definite way that it does. We can also grasp that each being is one (*unum*): it is not divided or distinct from itself, that is, the laws of noncontradiction and identity apply to it. It also appears distinct from others, and as allowing for the existence of others (Thomas Aquinas 1888, q.30, a.3; Emery 2007, pp. 140–41). Reality always appears as a multiplicity; by reflecting on our grasp of any one being, we can become aware that there could be other beings. Given that to be is to be distinct

from others, it follows that every being is intrinsically relational: each being gives itself a standing in relation, at least the relation of distinction, to others (Clarke 1993; Schindler 1996, pp. 275–311; Spencer 2015).

If we reflect on our grasp of any being, we perceive *that* we grasp it, and so each being is true (*verum*), intelligible, capable of being cognitively grasped. We also grasp that it is good (*bonum*), valuable or worthwhile, capable of being desired or loved, at least as an end for acts of knowing. At this point, we reach the experience of transcendental beauty. While most classical scholastics do not include beautiful (*pulchrum*) in lists of transcendentals, some scholastically influenced thinkers have argued for its inclusion. (Unless otherwise noted, the account of beauty in the rest of this chapter draws upon Maritain 1930; 1953; von Balthasar 1989; 1991; 2009; Hart 2003; Jaroszyński 2011.) We not only can experience a being as such to be knowable and desirable but as pleasing to know; this is fundamentally what it means, in this tradition, to call something beautiful. Beings can give themselves simultaneously to cognition and affection. The pleasure given by beauty is not pleasure in the being insofar as it is useful or good for us, or in just one of its aspects, but pleasure in the being in itself, that is, as a whole. If beauty is that in a being that gives rise to this experience, then beauty is the holistic self-manifestation of a being.

Each being appears as a unity, but also includes many aspects, such as the transcendentals just enumerated. These appear not as entirely distinct from each other, but as inseparable features of each being. Yet they are not entirely the same as one another; for example, *being intelligible* is a distinct disposition from *being desirable*, since each is a distinct conceptualizable content and each causes distinct effects. They do not appear as just conceptually distinct, that is, distinct just from our viewpoint or distinct in our concepts. Rather, since they cause and explain distinct effects, they appear as distinct features of beings themselves. One way of making sense of this kind of manyness in each being is the Franciscan scholastic John Duns Scotus' *formal distinction* (John Duns Scotus 1956, d.5, p.2, q.un., n.116; d.8, p.1, q.4, n.191–222; 1959, d.13, q.un., n.18–19, 72; Cross 2005, pp. 105–111, 236–240; Dumont 2005). Aspects of a being that are formally distinct, its *formalities*, are neither merely distinguished by us nor separable from one another. All formalities of a being are *really identical* or *one in being* with that being and with each other, each characterizing the whole being. For example, each being is wholly one, true, good, and so forth. They are not distinct parts or properties of a being; those are explanatorily prior to their wholes, but formalities are not. Creaturely beings do have the potential to take on new perfections, actualities, or accidents, new ways of being complete, actual, disposed to self-manifestation, and valuable. But formalities are not accidents, but aspects of a being in itself. On the relative identity, identity without

sameness, and metaphysics of relations accounts mentioned above, identity is not transitive just when two things are the same being; something more is required. Likewise, on Scotus's account, strict, transitive identity requires identity in formality, not just real identity or identity in being. The truth and goodness of a particular being are one in being with each other, but not everything ascribable to the one is ascribable to the other; in this metaphysics, this is explained by the fact that they are not one in formality. (For a more complete account of logical laws on this view, see Spencer 2017.)

Building on the Platonic and Greek Patristic traditions, theologian Natalie Carnes identifies two features of beauty that explain why a whole being can please when known and that are experienced as necessary features of any beauty (Carnes 2014). First, each being has aspects that *fit* or *harmonize* with one another, that is, they can be perceived to go well with one another. Most beings also *lack* fittingness to some extent and so appear sensorily or morally ugly or prosaic in certain respects (von Hildebrand 2016, pp. 261–281). At the very least, each being's transcendentals fit together, and so each being is beautiful at least in itself. But most beings exhibit fit in other respects too. For example, they might exhibit harmony or proportion in their accidents or between their form and their matter, as a well-proportioned human body does, or they might appear well with other beings or with their surroundings, as when a building appears pleasingly in the context of a landscape. But fit need not involve proportion or harmony; for example, a dissonant note in a musical piece might appear as the right note, and so as fitting best in that piece. In perceiving any fit in a being, the being fits with our cognitive and affective powers, so that we enjoy the being just in perceiving it. A pure unity, lacking any multiplicity of features that fit with each other, could not be beautiful—and so, on the theory of transcendentals given above, could not exist. In experiencing fit, we simultaneously perceive both unity and multiplicity as positive aspects of beauty and being. For example, the distinctions among a beautiful painting's aspects do not appear as merely a provisional aspect of the painting's beauty that ought to be transcended to reach a purely unitary beauty. Rather, the manyness of the painting's aspects appears as an irreducible feature of the whole painting's beauty: one can only see the beauty of a painting by seeing that beauty manifested in its many aspects, such as paint, canvas, represented subjects, spatially arranged colors, and so forth. But a unifying beauty also shines through each part of a painting, when seen in its place in the whole, such that we see the painting *as* a whole. Similarly, beautiful things distended in time, like musical pieces, manifest a unifying beauty that gathers together all the notes into a whole and is present in each one of them when heard in its place in the whole. In every case, beauty appears as both unitary and through a multiplicity of features.

Second, Carnes describes beauty as involving *gratuitous excess*. The classical tradition connected beauty to *splendor* or *radiance*: beings shine forth or holistically self-manifest, and so exceed any particular features that can be distinguished in them. As with fit, splendor takes many forms: the shine of light through stained glass, the grandeur of a mountain, and the awe-inspiring glory of an act of self-sacrifice. But, minimally, splendor is given in the experience of being as a whole with all its transcendentals appearing together, but as something more than those particular properties (Maritain 1953, ch.5). In each case, splendor can appear as a gratuitous gift; it is an aspect of beings beyond their usefulness or their place in a conceptual or explanatory system, worth enjoying and responding to for itself. Because of this gratuitous excess, beauty when fully perceived gives not just superficial pleasure, but rather, in different cases, gives deep joy, peace, wonder, or awe. By its splendor, beauty can experientially draw us out of ourselves to have affection and reverence for the beautiful being for its own sake. We experience it as not only giving itself to us perceptually but as bestowing goods, including these deep forms of pleasure, upon us. We can find ourselves called to devote ourselves to attending to and admiring that beautiful being, and that devotion appears entirely justified by the beauty.

Beauty when fully perceived also appears as inviting us to imitate it: when I see its harmony and splendor, I can experience myself being called to make myself more harmonious and splendid, and so fit better with the beauty I perceive. The most perfect, virtuous actions we can perform, Aristotle says, are beautiful actions done for the sake of their beauty (Aristotle 1894, IV.1.1120a23-30)—that is, actions that fit with and splendidly reveal what we human persons are, and that are done because of the intrinsic value of those acts in themselves insofar as that value is perceivable as intrinsically attractive and worthwhile. Phenomenologist Dietrich von Hildebrand describes perceiving beauty as resembling the experience of someone loving me, bestowing goods on me, and drawing me into experiential and loving union with it (von Hildebrand 2016, p. 451). Similarly, theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar links beauty to the idea of "sacrifice": beauty appears as offering itself in a way that leads to others' betterment, and as calling perceivers to offer themselves for the sake of what is better (von Balthasar 2000, pp. 216–227). Likewise, Plato describes how beauty is fecund and creative: it can make its perceiver desire to become more beautiful and to create more beauty (Plato 1997c, 201d-212c). As described by these thinkers in the classical tradition, beauty appears as oriented to perceivers, and in order to fully appear, beauty must be perceived and lead to further beauty. Beauty appears in a being's holistic self-manifestation, which is pleasing when perceived, but it appears no less in its reception and in the creative products of that reception. Once again, being is directly given as intrinsically relational.

Each of these features of beauty is most fully present, as medieval theologian Richard of St. Victor says, when persons act in charity or self-sacrificial love (Richard of St. Victor 1855, pp. 949–961), that is, with fully cognizant, willing, complete self-gift to another. One cannot sacrifice oneself perfectly to oneself because sacrifice requires one to give up or offer what is one's own, and that requires that every relationship of perfect love involve multiple persons, such that there can be another to whom one offers what is one's own. As in the account of virtuous acts from Aristotle above, these beautiful acts fit most perfectly with human persons and splendidly manifest what we are. They also can reveal how beauty is always for others, requiring that others exist, and how beauty leads to further beauty in others, for charitable acts must be done for others, and, ideally, bring about beautiful effects in those others and inspire others to perform charitable acts themselves.

We have seen that beautiful beings give themselves to others holistically. Beauty is communicable, able to be shared with others; since in being beautiful, beings give themselves holistically, it follows that each being is wholly communicable. But in giving itself to others, a beautiful being does not lose itself or cease to be. There is something about each beautiful being that is incommunicable, and not able to be shared with others. Each beauty belongs in some way to something incommunicable, something that uniquely possesses itself and its self-manifestations, and is thereby really distinct from all others. (Some beautiful beings, like accidents, are not themselves incommunicable, but they belong to incommunicable beings.) Insofar as a being is incommunicably its own, the tradition calls it a *hypostasis* or *supposit*. Any hypostasis that is intellectual and free is a *person*. (On all these metaphysical claims, see Thomas Aquinas 1888, q.29; q.30, a.4). We can explain how beings can be wholly incommunicable and wholly communicable using the metaphysics of formalities. Each formality in a being, as we saw, wholly characterizes that being, but is not strictly the same as the other formalities in that being. Using this account, we can say that in each perceived beauty, there is a being that has formalities whereby it incommunicably possesses itself and all its aspects, and formalities whereby it communicates itself. In persons, the former can be called a *formality of personhood*. To be a person is both to uniquely possess oneself and to be in relations of self-manifestation and self-gift with others (Hasker 2013, p. 99; von Balthasar 1990, pp. 207–213, 285–292).

On the metaphysics drawn from the tradition here, to be is to be self-manifesting. Every being, as being, includes acts that manifest it in a manner fitting with its nature. On this view, to be a personal being intrinsically involves manifesting oneself intellectually and freely. An act is free when it is done for reasons; when reasons do not necessitate a particular action, one's free acts are contingent. In those cases, when one

acts freely, one could have done otherwise. (This does not mean that in those cases, one could do something good or something evil; being able to choose among goods is sufficient for meeting this condition.) As the scholastic tradition has largely understood, God necessarily freely loves Himself and wills His own perfection, but his acts of willing to create certain creatures are contingent: God could have not created, or could have created other creatures than those He did. Human free acts add to a human person's perfection; they are accidents, and so presuppose that we have potentialities to take on new perfections. But, on this account, acts as such (including free acts as such) do not presuppose the existence of a potentiality to take on new perfections. Not every contingent act is an actualization of a prior potentiality, but only those acts that are new perfections over and above the perfection already possessed by the agent. Rather, contingent, free acts belong to the structure of personal beings as such, as the self-manifesting beings they intrinsically are.

In the classical tradition, the idea that being as such includes variable acts has been captured by the Greek Patristic notion of "energies" or "activities" (*energeiai*). Like formalities, activities are one in being with their agent: to be is to act, even to act contingently, without this necessarily implying any addition of accidents, perfections, or parts. Activities as such are the manifestation of a being's beauty that must accompany every being. This does not entail that a being's contingent free acts are metaphysically necessary to that being; rather, it belongs to the necessary structure of a free being as such to have *some* contingent free acts, but *which* acts the being has is up to that being. On this metaphysics, a free being is *one in being* with its contingent acts, and, had that being chosen otherwise, it would have been one in being with some other contingent acts (Gregory Palamas 1983; 1995; Bradshaw 2004; Spencer 2017; 2022).

Before turning to an account of God that can be grounded in this perception of beauty and its metaphysical elucidation, I shall sum up this account of beauty. First, beauty is that which can deeply please just upon being perceived, and this is a transcendental property of each being. Second, beauty is the holistic self-manifestation of a being. Third, beauty involves fit, which requires both unity and multiplicity. Fourth, beauty involves gratuitous excess, which involves being oriented to being perceived by others, and, when perceived, can lead to further beauty, and this is all most fully found in persons acting lovingly. Fifth, beauty is possessed and communicated by incommunicable hypostases. Sixth, beauty involves contingent acts of self-manifestation that belong to the intrinsic structure of a being.

15.2 Beauty and the Classical, Trinitarian God

Many observers of beauty, going back to classical thinkers like Plato and Gregory of Nyssa, have noted how lesser beauties point towards greater ones (Viladesau 1999, pp. 105–120; Carnes 2014, pp. 59–79, 120–124).

Due to this aspect of the experience of beauty, there are at least three ways that experiences of beauty as described above reveal the existence of the God described by classical theism.

First, the experience of finite beauty can only be fully explained by an absolute beauty in which they share. No finite beauty sums up all that it is to be beautiful; each appears as allowing for the existence of other finite beauties. If various particulars each partially manifest one perfection, and do so to varying degrees, this presupposes that there is a standard for that perfection, an absolute perfection that is partially found in each of those manifestations. Hence, finite beauties presuppose the existence of an absolute, perfect beauty (Plato 1997b, 476a-b). Since beauty includes all transcendentals, absolute beauty would include absolute being, perfection, nature, unity, truth, and goodness, and so we can rightly call it "God." God, on this unpacking of the experience of beauty, not only has all perfections, but would be that in which all beauties (and, so, all beings) share for their perfections. (Compare the Fourth Way in Thomas Aquinas 1888, q.2, a.3; Urban 1984.) Such a God would be as perfect as any being could be, already disposed to self-manifest in any possible way, and therefore would be impassible, unable to be causally influenced in the sense of receiving new perfections.

Second, from the experience of finite beauties, we can ascend to perceive more perfect beauties. For example, from an awareness of beautiful bodies or words, our attention and desire can be directed to the deeper beauty of moral and spiritual acts and characters. From the beauty of particulars, we can be moved to perceive the beauty of the whole cosmos. The love and joy that one beauty awakens in us are intimations of yet greater love and joy that we can receive from deeper beauties; perceiving beauty can involve an experience of one's heart being "wounded," of a longing arising for ever-greater beauty (Carnes 2014, pp. 101–105, 203–209). Eventually, by being trained to perceive ever more perfect beauties, we can ascend to perceive absolute beauty, which gives the fullness of pleasure when perceived (Plato 1997c, 201d-212c). If particular beauties merit some devotion, absolute beauty would merit absolute devotion. Each particular beauty appears as existing, at least in part, in order to convey perceivers' attention to absolute beauty; hence, all things appear in this experience as existing for the sake of absolute beauty. Once again, it seems right to call that beauty for the sake of which all others exist "God."

Third, not only can we reason or ascend from finite to absolute beauty, but we can directly perceive absolute beauty in finite beauties (Plato 1997a, 250d). In the gratuitous excess of any beautiful being, there can appear an infinite depth of beauty. Just as through each note of a whole musical piece or each feature of a painting there appears a unifying beauty, so through each finite beauty, perceived in the context of the whole cosmos, there can appear a unifying absolute beauty (Bradshaw 2012).

Like any beauty, this absolute beauty appears as the *fit* among all its many manifestations, and a gratuitous excess in all of them. Particular beauties can appear as arising out of this infinite depth, and so perfect beauty can appear as the source of all things, that which gives them all. In perceiving any beautiful being, we can perceive God, albeit inchoately, mediated by that being's beauty. Once again, it is appropriate to call this infinite beauty "God." Since God shines stably through all finite beings at all times, God is *eternal*. This must be understood not purely as not being subject to time, but as what precontains all the plenitude of beauty that is then distended in time.

The God that appears through beauty is the most explanatory being, the first giver and last end of all finite beauties, and that in which they all share for their beauty. As such, nothing can be prior to God; the God revealed in beauty lacks all parts and principles, and so is *simple*, where this is understood fundamentally as having the fullness of self-manifesting beauty that is imperfectly imitated by what is composed, finite, or limited (cf. Bonaventure 1891b). The language of "simplicity," as theologian Lewis Ayres notes, safeguards the awareness that God ineffably transcends all finite beings, though this transcendence allows God's presence to each of those beings (Ayers 2004, pp. 142, 281, 286–287). But the account of divine simplicity required by these arguments from beauty is, perhaps controversially, a much more flexible notion of simplicity than the version of simplicity defended by many thinkers. The notion of simplicity defended here is compatible with many intrinsic distinctions in God; it only excludes those distinctions that imply imperfection or lack (Spencer 2017). On various views in the Christian tradition, divine simplicity is compatible with real distinctions among divine persons, or with distinct formalities or activities in God. Each being as such includes many formalities and activities, and so this must be true of God too. God has many activities of self-manifestation since God appears through each finite beauty. These activities do not involve God taking on accidents or new perfections; they are just manifesting the beautiful being God already is.

The God Who is revealed by beauty is impassible, simple, eternal, absolutely perfect, and the source and end of all things—in short, the God of classical theism. But the God revealed by beauty also must be multiple persons. Like any beauty, God must include a formality of incommunicability; as the highest beauty, God must possess beauty in the highest way, that is, in a personal way. As its source, God precontains all the beauty in the cosmos in some way; as a personal being, the beauty of personal love must actually be in God. As we have seen, beauty requires perceivers. Furthermore, personal love is an act of self-gift: the perfection of love requires another person to whom one gives oneself. In God, the beauty of perfect love must be perfect, since God has all of His attributes perfectly. While God's beauty is received by creatures, they cannot be its

only recipients. Creaturely beauties are contingent manifestations of perfect beauty, none of which perfectly receives that absolute beauty. Hence, the recipient of beauty and love required for God as such to be perfect beauty must be in God. Since the self-gift involved in the highest instance of beauty requires that one person give himself to another, divine beauty cannot be perfectly given and received by the same person; that is, since God is perfect beauty, God must be multiple persons. There must be at least one person in God Who gives that perfect beauty, and at least one person Who perfectly receives it.

Medieval theologians, including Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure, argue that if God is love, and, as we saw above, perfect love is always between persons, then God must be multiple persons. Furthermore, a perfect relationship of love cannot be closed in on itself but must be shared with a third. (I consider reasons to hold that there *only* three persons in God in the next section.) Bonaventure similarly argues that to be perfect, joy must be shared among many friends, and so, since God is perfectly joyful, God must include multiple persons. (Richard of St. Victor 1855, pp. 949–961; Bonaventure 1882, d. 2, a.un., q. 2; d.10 q.2; Bonaventure 1883, d.27, p.1, a.un., q.2, ad3; Cullen 2006, pp. 118–119; Hayes 2014, pp. 208–225; Emery 2007, pp. 23–24; Bray 2021; cf. Swinburne 1994, pp. 177–178; Hasker 2013, pp. 149–150). Similarly, on my account, God, as perfect beauty, must include a person Who gives beauty, a person Who receives it, and a person with whom that beauty is creatively shared. The experience of beauty reveals that there must be at least three incommunicable persons in God. These persons cannot be "instances" of divine beauty, where "instance" would imply the composition of a universal with a principle of individuation. Rather, one perfect beauty is had by three persons, distinguished by three formalities of personhood, which render each of them their own, really distinct from the others, and by which they each possess and include the shared beauty. (A *formality of personhood* is not the same as a *person*; persons include both the formality of personhood and communicable formalities.) We have seen that being one in being or nature with another does not make one strictly identical to that other. Since all perfections, aside from unique formalities of incommunicability, are included in their shared beauty, then these three really distinct persons will be really identical to one and the same nature, power, activities, and will, all of which is possessed by each of them in unique, distinct ways.

15.3 Versions of Trinitarianism Permitted by and Excluded from this View

The perception of beauty is evidence both for the existence of the God of classical theism and for that God being *at least* three persons. Hence, this is an account on which classical theism is consistent with a view on

which God is *only* three persons. But Bonaventure and others sought to show that these considerations show that God is *certainly* only three persons. On those arguments, the Father, as perfectly self-giving goodness and beauty, produces as many persons as there are kinds of self-giving. In Bonaventure's view, following Aristotle, there are only two basic kinds of self-giving: by *natural generation* the Father produces the Son as Word, the natural product of an intellectual nature, and by *free generosity* the Spirit is produced as the perfect fruit of a loving will (Bonaventure 1882, d.2, q.2; d.6, q.2; Hayes 2014, pp. 206–207).

The claim that these are the only two fundamental ways beings give themselves seems to me unmotivated. One could object that there are significant differences between natural generation and intellectual production of words, and so these are distinct kinds of self-giving. On that objection's view, given Bonaventure's reasoning, there would be one divine person produced by natural generation, another by intellectual production, and yet another by free generosity. Furthermore, the argument above—that beauty and love shared among two must always, because of their fecund excess and transcendence over closed communities, also involve a third—shows that God must be *at least* three persons, but it does not necessarily exclude more persons. If there is reason to think that beauty and love are perfectly received in its two recipients, then that is reason to think that there are *only* three divine persons. Hence, the evidence I have considered is consistent with Trinitarianism, but it is also consistent with views on which God is more than three persons, such as Neo-Platonic views on which divine unity, goodness, and beauty are wholly had by many unique, simple gods or *henads* (Butler 2008; Hankey 2019). If God is *only* three persons, then that is not known with certainty through considerations based on perceiving beauty, though there are reasons based on such considerations that are consistent with (and perhaps even favor) holding that God is only three persons.

However, the evidence given in perceiving beauty excludes modalism and tritheism. In *modalism*, divine "persons" are just properties, modes, acts, or streams of consciousness in the divine nature that are not really distinct or incommunicable (McCall and Rea 2009, pp. 8–9). But the God Who is perfect beauty must have multiple formalities of *incommunicability*, such that the divine nature is possessed by multiple persons, who are each incommunicable and really distinct. On *tritheism*, the divine nature is a universal of which there are three numerically distinct instances, where there is a distinction of parts between the universal and a principle of individuation. But on the view of God yielded by perceiving beauty, God lacks any distinction that would involve something prior to God, which would include composition, constitution, hylomorphic relations, or instantiation in God or the divine persons. But it does not exclude views, like that which Richard Cross ascribes to Gregory of Nyssa, on which the divine nature is a universal belonging to

three persons, but where the relation between universal and individual involves no distinction of parts or properties (Cross 2002). Since both personhood and natural attributes are formalities in God, they are equally fundamental, and all natural attributes are wholly possessed by the persons.

Many versions of Trinitarianism are consistent with the view of God yielded by the perception of Beauty, and so are consistent with classical theism. Various scholastics held that what distinguishes the persons are relations or origins. For example, what distinguishes the Father is the begetting relation, or being the one capable of begetting; what distinguishes the Son is the being begotten relation or being the one who is begotten. So long as "begetting" involves the giving of beauty and "being begotten" involves its perfect reception, this is consistent with my account; the formalities of incommunicable personhood, on various metaphysics consistent with this account would just be relational formalities or would include both relational and non-relational formalities (Thomas Aquinas 1888, I, q.29, a.4; q.33; Bonaventure 1891a; Emery 2007, pp. 122–125; Hayes, pp. 210–212; cf. John Duns Scotus 1956, d.8, p.1, q.4, n.209).

Some *social Trinitarianisms* are also compatible with this account. Divine being, beauty, and activities must be fully possessed by each person, but there are many ways they can be possessed. In von Balthasar's view, for example, no person acts apart from or in conflict with the others, and all activities involve all three persons, but each person performs each activity in a distinct way. For example, the Father performs an act of love by offering the divine nature to the Son, the Son performs that act by accepting and offering this love back in grateful obedience, while the Spirit is the fruit and bond of this love. All three persons are full of wonder, even something analogous to astonishment and surprise, at the gratuitous excess of one another's beautiful acts. (While von Balthasar defends the *filioque* view, on which the Spirit is the fruit of the love of Father and Son, and while that view fits with the experience of beauty involving fecund creativity, the experience of beauty does not necessitate holding that view; it only requires *that there be a third person* in God.) Activities, like willing or loving, are explained by a being's nature. Since the three persons have one nature, they do not have distinct activities of willing or loving, when activity is understood as an *act as explained by a nature*; if by "activity" we mean an *act as possessed by a person*, they have distinct tokens of acts (cf. Williams 2020). Von Balthasar emphasizes the persons' incommunicability and their unique kinds of self-offering, and thereby their absolute difference from one another *as persons*. God's simplicity is compatible with the greatest of differences among persons, so long as they are the same beauty as each other (von Balthasar 1998, pp. 61–99). It is even compatible with a sort of hierarchy among the

persons, where the Father is the source of divine beauty and so is most properly called "God" (understood as meaning a *source without source*), as on *monarchical* views of the Trinity, so long as all the persons equally have divine beauty (Bychkov 2008; Branson, forthcoming).

My account excludes those social Trinitarianisms on which the persons compose a larger entity that we might call "the Trinity" or a divine community (Craig 2009), since the God revealed by beauty lacks all composition, and so the persons cannot be parts of anything. But my account is consistent with holding that a further beauty, beyond that which just is God's being and nature, is found in the harmony or *fit* of the persons' giving and receiving of divine beauty, which is sometimes called their *perichoresis* or *cicumincessio* (Emery 2007, pp. 300–309). This would be a gratuitous excess of beauty in God, over and above the beauty of God's being, but not an additional part or composed whole.

Finally, my model is consistent with views on which particular persons have divine beauty in a particular way, as described in the scholastic theory of *appropriation*. Although attributes like goodness, wisdom, and power belong to God by nature and so are possessed by all three persons, some scholastics saw that we could better understand each person by associating certain properties more with each one. For example, goodness presupposes wisdom, which presupposes power, just as the Spirit presupposes the Son, Who in turn presupposes the Father. We can understand these persons better by thinking of the Spirit as good, the Son as wise, and the Father as powerful. These attributes are *appropriated* to these persons. This helps us grasp the Father as the ultimate source of all things, the Son as the Word by Whom the world was wisely made, and the Spirit as the one Who communicates God's goodness to the world. As Aquinas argues, this is a discovery of affinities in God between one person and an attribute. Some medievals, like Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus, appropriated beauty to the Son: the Son is the perfect image of the Father, Who manifests the Father's glory and the intelligible natures of all things, and so is God's beauty or holistic self-manifestation in a special way. Others, like Hugh of St. Victor, appropriate beauty to the Spirit: as in a body, the figure or quantified structure displays itself in a qualitative form, and this in turn reveals itself in splendid, excessive beauty, so the Father, Son, and Spirit are related (Thomas Aquinas 1888, q.39, a.8; Hugh of St. Victor 1880, p. 232; Bychkov 2008; Emery 2007, pp. 312–330; Hayes 2014, p. 239). One might also appropriate beauty to the Father, since beauty is the ultimate source of all things, just as is the Father (cf. Viladesau 1999, p. 165). In any case, so long as the beauty that is the divine being is held to be equally possessed by all persons, we can hold one or all of these appropriations. We thereby see how each person not only possesses divine beauty but does so in a unique, incommunicable way.

By the experience of perceiving beauty, as traditionally described, we can perceive how classical theism is compatible with a range of versions of Trinitarianism. The natural theologian cannot prove, on the basis of that experience alone, that God is exactly three persons, but can do much to clear away objections to that view. Most importantly, this account can train our perception so that we more fully see the beauty of the world, and, above all, the perfect beauty that shines through all things.[1]

Note

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16 The Incarnation of a Simple God

Tim Pawl

16.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide an account of how it is possible for a simple God to become incarnate. In previous work, I have shown how an incarnation is not inconsistent with certain doctrines of Classical Theism, for instance impassibility, immutability, ineffability, and atemporality. That work required analyzing the truth conditions for the relevant predicates.[1] Those truth conditions, as I show later in this paper, did not diminish Classical Theism; it was no bait and switch.

Here, I begin with a brief presentation of the method employed when considering those other divine attributes. Next, I show how the same methodology could be used to understand the doctrine of divine simplicity with similar beneficial results. I finally list a few benefits of conceptualizing simplicity as I do here and answer three objections to doing so as well.

16.2 Initial and Revised Truth Conditions

How should we understand the concepts of divine immutability or divine impassibility? Assuming, as I will throughout, that the Christian proponent of either of those doctrines does not wish to affirm the truth of contradictions, then she ought not to conceptualize them as meaning something like "unable to change" and "unable to be causally affected."[2] That is, the Christian Classical Theist ought not to understand the truth conditions for those predicates in the following ways:

Initial Truth Conditions

Passible:	s is passible just in case it is possible that at least one other thing causally affect s. (P ↔ C)
Impassible:	s is impassible just in case it is not the case that it is possible that at least one other thing causally affect s. (IP ↔ ~C)

Mutable: s is mutable just in case s is able to change. (M ↔ AC)
Immutable: s is immutable just in case it is not the case that s is able to change.
            (IM ↔ ~AC)[3]

We can see immediately why such a conceptualization would not be available to a Christian who does not wish to contradict herself. According to traditional Christian teaching, Jesus Christ was (and is) the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is true God (and true man). And he both changed and was causally affected. So, it would be straightforwardly false that God is impassible or immutable if those were the right conceptions of the predicates.

But it is clear that traditional Christian orthodoxy commits one to both an impassible Christ who suffers and an immutable Christ who changes. I've provided detailed evidence for these claims elsewhere (see Pawl 2016c, pp. 16–18, Chapter 8)); I will only offer a few paradigmatic texts here. On the one hand, the Council of Ephesus, the third ecumenical council, includes authoritative texts that say of Christ that "he is unchangeable and immutable by nature," that "he is unalterable and absolutely unchangeable and remains always the same as the scriptures say," and that "we all confess that the Word of God is impassible" (Tanner 1990, 51, 53, 72–3 respectively). On the other hand, they clearly teach that he changed and suffered. We need to look no further than the Creed of Nicaea which includes the line that he "suffered (in the Latin translation: *passus est*), died, and was buried" (Tanner 1990, p. 5). In fact, the ecumenical councils include explicit statements that claim these apparently contradictory predicates both apply to the one Christ. In just one example that I've used in other contexts, the 4th Council of Constantinople says:

> "We also know that the seventh, holy and universal synod, held for the second time at Nicaea, taught correctly when it professed the one and same Christ as both invisible and visible lord, incomprehensible and comprehensible, unlimited and limited, incapable and capable of suffering [*impassibilem etiam et passibilem*], inexpressible and expressible in writing."
>
> (Tanner 1990, p. 162)[4]

Five contradictory conjunctions in a row! What's one to do?

Think of the uncharitable interpretive implications of claiming that the Christian conciliar fathers, theologians, and philosophers held to the initial truth conditions or something like them. In such a case, they would have been holding *obviously contradictory* views at the center of their worldview. For instance, they would be holding that Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, was impassible, meaning unable to be causally affected, and also passible, meaning able to be causally affected.

They would be holding that the claim "Christ is passible" is true, and that the very same claim is not true.

Is the idea that they saw that contradiction but didn't think it was a problem? That seems most dubious. They chastise their opponents for contradictions or absurdities at every turn. They look to argue for the consistency of their own views just as frequently. To think that they all were fine with the obvious contradiction evinces a lack of knowledge of their corpus.[5]

Is the idea, instead, that they didn't see it? The Fathers at second Nicaea said *one and the same Christ is both impassible and passible*, and it struck *none* of them as a problematic assertion? The gathered Fathers at fourth Constantinople double down on the claim, again, oblivious to the logical ramifications? That strikes me as even less plausible than the first interpretation! No, in my view, the most charitable interpretation here is that they didn't take the terms to be contradictory as they understood them.

To stipulate that impassibility or immutability *must* be understood in the initial sense, then, is both to preclude the orthodox understanding of the incarnation at the outset of the discussion and to imply the falsity of traditional Christianity. For, as we have seen, Conciliar Christology requires that Christ be both passible and impassible, and, on the initial truth conditions, such a requirement implies a contradiction. This might not be problematic for those who think that an incarnation is impossible—in fact, understanding metaphysical perfections as to rule out an incarnation, and so rule out Christianity, might be seen as a boon to some—but it is entirely understandable at this juncture why a *Christian* drawn to Classical Theism would go looking for another conceptualization of those doctrines.

How, then, ought a Christian proponent of Classical Theism to understand the divine attributes in question, such that we can truthfully say that God (and Christ) is both immutable and impassible? I've argued elsewhere that they ought to be understood like this:

Revised Truth Conditions

Passible:	s is passible just in case s has a concrete nature that it is possible for some other thing to causally affect. (P ↔ s has a N that is C)
Impassible:	s is impassible just in case s has a concrete nature that it is impossible for some other thing to causally affect. (IP ↔ s has a N that is ~C)
Mutable:	s is mutable just in case s has a concrete nature that is able to change. (M ↔ s has a N that is AC)
Immutable:	s is immutable just in case s has a concrete nature that is not able to change. (IM ↔ s has a N that is ~AC)

By "concrete nature" in this context, I refer to the divine nature, shared (in whatever sense) by the three persons, and to the human nature, which Cyril describes in the authoritative texts of the Council of Ephesus as "flesh enlivened by a rational soul" (Tanner 1990, p. 41).

These understandings of the truth conditions for the predicates allow for one thing to be both passible and impassible, both mutable and immutable. Since the traditional conciliar texts teach as much, this understanding of the terms is a boon for the Christian proponent of Classical Theism. As such, these understandings of the predicates in question give the proponent of Conciliar Christology a means to answer the Fundamental Philosophical Problem of Christology—how can one thing be both God and man, when to be God requires perfections that no human could have.

So much for these revised understandings of the terms and the benefits they bring to traditional Christology. What can similar work with the truth conditions for a thing's being "simple" do for the Christian proponent of Classical Theism?

16.3 A Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

Simplicity is a central aspect of Classical Theism. This is so in the Christian tradition as well, where we find many Church Fathers claiming that God is simple, and we find different ecclesial bodies defining that God is simple. For instance, the Catholic Church defines, in the doctrinal sense, that God is *omino simplex* at least three times across two ecumenical councils (Lateran 4 and Vatican 1 (Tanner 1990, pp. 230, 232, 805)). But the term itself, "simple," goes without definition in the councils, and so the Catholic has some leeway in conceptualizing that divine attribute.[6] How ought a Christian proponent of Classical Theism to understand divine simplicity? The reader will be unsurprised to see that I go through the same steps in understanding it as I did for the other attributes of Classical Theism.

We start with an initial truth condition. As we know, there are many ways one might define divine simplicity. Perhaps it is the thesis that God has no parts at all. Or, that God has no parts *and* also is not a part of any other whole. Or perhaps it is best put as the claim that God has no potency, but is pure act. Or perhaps simplicity is a (the?) most important implication of God's being pure act. These are all interesting and important suggestions about how we ought to understand the content of divine simplicity. But, for my purposes, the exact language is not needful, for at least two reasons. First, as I will show below, no matter what exact wording we use, these initial understandings of divine simplicity are inconsistent with an incarnation for the same sorts of reasons that the initial understanding of divine immutability is inconsistent with the incarnation—and this no matter which specification

we use of the doctrine. Second, settling the exact wording is not needful for me here because the methodology I suggest is derivative, in the following sense. As we can see from the initial and revised definitions of immutable and impassible, the methodology inserts a clause, *has a nature that*, into the definition. The rest of the truth conditions stay the same in both definitions. In other words, I can use this same methodology on any of the various conceptualizations of simplicity that begin this paragraph.

With that said, allow me to pick a characterization of the doctrine and give initial truth conditions of the terms "simple" and "complex," which I take to be related to each other in the traditional discussion as "immutable" and "mutable" are related to each other:

Initial Truth Conditions

| Complex: | s is complex just in case s has parts. (C ↔ P) |
| Simple: | s is simple just in case it is not the case that s has parts. (S ↔ ~P) |

Here I mean to use the word "parts" in the most general sense, in which physical components (e.g., hands), properties (e.g., courage), metaphysical constituents (e.g., the act of existing), etc. all count as parts.

Whether or not God the Father or God the Spirit is simple in this initial sense of having no parts, or having no potency, or some other related sense, God the Word, Christ, is *not* simple in any of those senses. Christ had, according to Conciliar teaching, both a body and a soul, hands, and accidental features like height, weight, and shape. He had many of the same potencies that you or I have—he had the potency to sit at the times when he was standing, or speak at the times when he was being silent, and so on.

This inability of Christ to be simple while incarnate may not seem like a problem to some, but it would have at least two problems for traditional Christian proponents of Classical Theism. First, the initial understanding of divine simplicity implies that a divine person, the Word, is only contingently simple, and so simplicity would not be a necessary condition for a maximally great thing. This, though, would count against a main line of defense of divine simplicity, perfect being theology, which typically claims that simplicity is required of a maximally great being.

Second, Christ's not being simple would be contrary to the thought of some of the staunchest defenders of Christian Classical Theism, for instance, Thomas Aquinas (*ST* III q.2 a.4). In fact, we find Aquinas, following the authority of St John Damascene, saying that Christ was both simple *and* complex, much like we see the councils saying that Christ is both passible and impassible.[7] It would, for many Christians, be a point in favor of a conception of simplicity if it could make sense of Christ's being both simple and complex.

Note the happy consequence, then, in seeing that a revised set of truth conditions for being simple and being complex do allow Christ to be both, in just the same way that Christ can be both mutable and immutable. Consider these revised truth conditions for the terms:

Revised Truth Conditions

Complex:	s is complex just in case s has a concrete nature that has parts. (C ↔ s has a N that is P)
Simple:	s is simple just in case s has a concrete nature that does not have parts. (S ↔ s has a N that is ~P)

On this revised account of divine simplicity, Christ could be both simple and complex in the incarnation, insofar as he had one nature that fulfilled the conditions for being simple and another that fulfilled the conditions for being complex. By using the revised truth conditions I spell out in this paper, the traditional Christian proponent of Classical Theism could safeguard both the conciliar proclamations concerning Christ's incarnation and the content of Classical Theism.

16.4 Benefits

These understandings of the divine attributes have many benefits for the Christian proponent of Classical Theism. First and most importantly, as I've spelled out above, they allow the traditional Christian proponent of Classical Theism to defend the consistency of the doctrinal claims of the councils and Classical Theism. Such is no mean task!

Second, they are what we might call "materially adequate" (though an important caveat follows in the next paragraph). That is, for anything with a single nature, it is immutable in the initial sense if and only if it is immutable in the revised sense, and likewise for the predicates "mutable," "complex," and "simple." In other words, we cannot decide between the initial and revised truth conditions by means of finding a one-natured counterexample to one of the understandings, since each set of truth conditions will agree in all such cases. You and I count, *in both the initial and revised senses*, as mutable and not immutable, complex and not simple. In Christian theology, the Father and the Spirit count, *in both the initial and revised senses*, as immutable and not mutable, simple and not complex. It is only Christ, with his two natures, who can fulfill the conditions for being both mutable and immutable, both simple and complex. This is a welcome conclusion for proponents of traditional Christianity, since, as we've seen, the authoritative councils of the Christian Church declare Christ to be both mutable and immutable, and important theologians have held the same about simplicity and complexity. In short, this

second benefit is a benefit precisely because it does not require us to re-categorize what counts as fulfilling the conditions and what does not, and it does not require us to come up with an error theory about why we got our judgments wrong about what fulfilled the truth conditions in question. All the same one-natured stuff as before our revisions still stays where it was in our conceptualization.

Now for the caveat. The initial definitions of impassibility and passibility, but not simplicity and complexity, are about *possibility*, not actuality. Thus, if it were possible for either the Father or the Holy Spirit to become incarnate, then they, too, would count, even when not incarnate, as passible and not impassible in the initial sense. For, supposing that it is possible for the Father to become incarnate, then there is at least one possible world in which the Father is causally affectable. But then the Father fulfills the initial truth conditions for being passible—he is possibly causally affectable—and he fails to fulfill the initial truth conditions for being impassible. It follows, then, that if the Father or the Holy Spirit could become incarnate, the re-vised notions of impassibility and passibility would not be materially ade-quate. If the Father could become incarnate, then the Father would count as passible in the initial sense, but impassible in the revised sense.[8]

In reply, I note three things. First, recall my goal here. I am showing the benefits of understanding "complex" and "simple" in the revised sense. This second benefit is that the terms are materially adequate: for any one-natured thing, it is simple in the initial sense if and only if it is simple in the revised sense, and similarly for being complex. This ob-jection from the possibility of the Father or Holy Spirit becoming in-carnate doesn't show that benefit to be spurious. Even if the Father *could* be incarnate, he *is not*, and so fulfills both the initial and revised truth conditions for simplicity, on the classical view of God. So, conceding this objection in total would not negatively affect my goal in this section, the goal of showing a benefit for the revised conceptualization of simplicity.

A second reply. To speak in a manner that will be confusing, given how I've used the terms "revised" and "initial" already, we might revise our understanding of the initial truth conditions of passible and impassible. We might change the initial understanding to say that something counts as passible when it is *actually* causally affectable. Then the Father wouldn't fulfill the newly-revised initial conditions for being passible, since he is not incarnate in the actual world and so not actually causally affectable, even if he is possibly causally affectable. If we revise the initial understanding of passibility from *possibly* causally affectable to *actually* causally affectable, then the possibility of the other persons becoming incarnate would no longer be a problem for the material adequacy of impassibility and passibility.

A final reply. The possibility of an incarnation of the Father or Holy Spirit is a contested theological view.[9] It is only a subset of thinkers discussing these issues, then, who would find such an objection to the second benefit viable.

16.5 Three Objections: Insufficiently Classical, Insufficiently Christian, Still Contradictory

Three objections one might have in looking at this account of divine simplicity are that it is incongruous with traditional Christian interpretations of divine simplicity, that it is unacceptable as an interpretation of Classical Theism, and that, in the end, it is still contradictory. In this section I will discuss these objections in turn.

It is understandable that some folks may think that the revised truth conditions which I offer here are a weakening of Classical Theism (see Pawl, 2016c, pp. 174–175). They may say that any immutability worthy of that name must be an immutability in the robust, initial sense discussed and likewise for the other attributes of Classical Theism. What I'm offering here, by contrast, is weak sauce.

In reply, remember that the robust, initial sense of each of these attributes discussed is flatly contradictory with an incarnation, and so it is reasonable for Christians with sympathies for Classical Theism to attempt to find another understanding; this is an internally motivated move, not an arbitrary one.

In addition, even on this revised view, something gets to count as immutable in the initial sense. The divine nature is such that it is unchangeable, period. It can't go from being one way to being another way. Likewise for impassibility and simplicity: the nature fulfills the initial truth conditions for each. So, the proponent of Classical Theism who wants a divine thing to be robustly, initially impassible, immutable, and simple still gets what he wants: the divine nature is all these ways.

Consider the second objection---the objection that the view of simplicity that I spell out here is insufficiently Christian. Concerning the traditional Christian interpretation of divine simplicity, we can look to both the East and the West for some reason to think that simplicity does not require a thing's having no multiplicity in any sense. We can see this in both Catholic and Orthodox statements of faith.

Concerning Catholics, the Catholic Church teaches that there is a real distinction between the divine persons, and at the same time, that God is *omino simplex*. This real distinction does not imply, in their usage of the terms, that God is complex. In addition, the fourth Lateran Council, the first ecumenical council (on the Catholic reckoning) to assert that God is simple, claims that:

> This reality [the divine nature] neither begets nor is begotten nor proceeds; the Father begets, the Son is begotten and the holy Spirit proceeds. Thus there is a distinction of persons but a unity of nature.
> (Tanner 1990, p. 232)

Here too we see the distinction between the persons themselves and the divine nature. Whatever the relation between the nature and the persons, it is not what we might call "strict identity," by which I mean a relation that is reflexive, symmetric, transitive, and obeys Leibniz's Law (if x and y are strictly identical, then anything true of x is true of y and vice versa). The nature and persons are not strictly identical on this traditional Western view because Leibniz's Law fails when we substitute in the nature for x and a person for y. For instance, the predicate, "begets" is apt of the Father but *not* apt of the nature (or of the Son, or of the Spirit). Yet in the *very same paragraph* the Church declares that "the substance of the Father is indivisible, that is, absolutely simple." They did not mean *omino simplex* to rule out distinction in every sense.[10] And, importantly, the doctrine is not spelled out in such a manner that it requires the initial sense of "simple."

Concerning the Orthodox, consider the Hesychastic Councils in the 1300s. Assessing their level of authority in Orthodoxy is more difficult than assessing the level of authority of Lateran 4 in Catholicism. Be that as it may, these councils are accepted by many Orthodox as binding, and in fact seen by some as a ninth ecumenical council (in their reckoning). The third meeting of this council (or the third such council—the counting is contested and not relevant to my project) includes a set of decrees, the first of which codifies Gregory Palamas's distinction between the uncreated divine essence and the divine energies. The second decree tells us that these divine energies are uncreated. The third states that this distinction in God does not give rise to any complexity in God.[11] Here again, simplicity is not so strong as to rule out all distinction in God. Moreover, here again we do not see any justification for believing that a Christian understanding of simplicity must be the initial truth condition.

In both these cases, the official documents teach a distinction "within" God. As such, a proponent of Eastern or Western traditional Christianity who is also a proponent of Classical Theism cannot accept a view of divine simplicity that requires that there be no distinction, no matter what, in any way, in any sense, in God. Such a view is contrary to the accepted doctrines of both communities. I do not, then, think that the understanding of simplicity that I express in this paper fails to be consonant with Christianity on account of not being robust enough. In fact, quite the contrary: the more robust understandings of simplicity sometimes put forward are themselves inconsistent with traditional Eastern and Western Christianity.

A final objection goes as follows. The incarnation requires that a divine person have two natures. But, the having of two distinct natures is itself contrary to divine simplicity.[12] We might put the reasoning in this way.

1   If the doctrine of the incarnation is true, then one divine person has two natures.
2   If one divine person has two natures, then that divine person is complex.
3   If that divine person is complex, then he is not simple.
4   If a divine person is not simple, then the doctrine of divine simplicity is false.
5   Thus, if the doctrine of the incarnation is true, then the doctrine of divine simplicity is false (1–4, extended hypothetical syllogism).

What to make of this argument? It is valid. And the conclusion is contradictory to my stated aim in this chapter: providing an account of how an incarnate God can be simple. So I need some way of claiming that at least one premise is false. Moreover, that mode of response ought to be already nascent in my account, or else the account previously given is not sufficient for its task. Happily, I do think that there is an answer in that account.

I grant that premises 1 and 4 provide necessary conditions for the doctrines at hand: the incarnation *does* require a single divine person to have two natures; the doctrine of divine simplicity *does* require each of the divine persons to be simple. That leaves premises 2 and 3. Consider premise 3 first. On the initial truth conditions for simplicity and complexity, premise 3 is true. For, on the initial truth conditions of simplicity and complexity, the features necessarily preclude one another. And so, were the antecedent of 3 true—were Christ complex—the consequent of 3 would follow—he would not be simple.

On the revised truth conditions, on the other hand, we see that the implication expressed in 3 is false. The antecedent is true when Christ has a nature that is composed of parts. And he does have such a nature, on traditional Christology—his human nature. The consequent is false (that is, it is *true* that he is simple) when he has a nature that is not composed of parts. And he does have such a nature, on traditional Christology—his divine nature. So, the antecedent of 3 is true and the consequent of 3 is false. Thus, given the truth conditions for a material conditional, 3 is false. The objection, then, is unsound due to having a false third premise.

One might still wonder about the second premise: is it true? Here I will report a reason for thinking it is. It is very common (though not unanimous) in Christian tradition to think that any nature that is not the divine nature is itself a nature composed of parts. For instance, many in the Augustinian school, most vociferously some Franciscans, held a view often named "Universal Hylomorphism" upon which all nondivine substances, even immaterial ones, were composed of form and some sort of matter.[13] Of those who denied Universal Hylomorphism—most famously, Aristotelians like Thomas Aquinas—all nondivine substances were still composed, even if immaterial, of essence and existence. In either case, it follows that all

nondivine substances are composed of parts. Suppose that is true, for argument's sake. Then, for a divine person to have two natures, he would have to have the divine nature and, in addition, some nondivine, created nature. But any created nature is composed of parts. So he would have a nature composed of parts. In having such a nature, he fulfills the conditions required to be complex. Thus, assuming the common view that created natures have parts, if one divine person has two natures, then he is complex—that is, the second premise is true.[14]

16.6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the satisfaction conditions typically put forward for various component parts of Classical Theism are straightforwardly incompatible with an incarnation. As such, the Christian proponent of Classical Theism ought to provide other satisfaction conditions for those predicates. I then provided some satisfaction conditions from my previous work on the incarnation, extending it to include a discussion of divine simplicity.

The satisfaction conditions I offer have many benefits, two of which I listed above. They are materially equivalent in all one-nature cases to the initial truth conditions. They allow the possibility of a Classical Theistic God's becoming incarnate.

I also considered three objections one might have about this understanding of divine simplicity: First, it is too weak to be rightly considered part of Classical Theism; Second, it is incongruous with traditional Christian doctrine; and Third, the incarnation of a simple God remains inconsistent on my view. I have argued that none of these objections succeeds.[15]

Notes

1 See, for instance, Pawl (2014; 2016c; 2018, 2020b).
2 For a theory of the incarnation on which the prohibition against true contradictions is lifted, see Beall (2021).
3 I provide and discuss these initial truth conditions in Pawl (2014; 2016c, Chapter 7, especially pp. 173–4; 2018; 2019, pp. 65, 155–63; Pawl 2020c, section 7.5).
4 It is not hard to find other places where councils and Fathers predicate apparently inconsistent predicates of one and the same Christ. Paul Gavrilyuk (2006; 2009) provides copious evidence of this from the early eastern church. Considering the western church, the Creed of the 4th Lateran Council includes this claim: "Although he is immortal and unable to suffer according to his divinity, he was made capable of suffering and dying according to his humanity" (Tanner 1990, 230).
5 Though see Jc Beall (2019, pp. 420–421; 2021, pp. 108–111), who argues that this interpretation is, in fact, more charitable than my own.
6 Some good discussions of the different meanings of divine simplicity include Thomas McCall (2014) and Mark Spencer (2017).

7 For a good, recent discussion of Aquinas on simplicity and the incarnation, see (Gorman, 2017, chap. 3).

8 I thank Jonathan Rutledge for bringing this objection to my attention.

9 For discussions of the possibility of multiple incarnations, see Marilyn Adams (1985; 2006, pp. 198–99; 2009, p. 241; 2005), J.P. Arendzen (1941, p. 161), Fr. Kenneth Baker (2013, p. 47), Sjoerd Bonting (2003), Paul Brazier (2013), William Lane Craig (2006, p. 63), Oliver Crisp (2008; 2009, chap. 8), Richard Cross (2005, pp. 230–32), Paul Davies (2003), Christopher Fisher and David Fergusson (2006), Thomas Flint (2001, p. 312; 2012, pp. 192–98), Alfred Freddoso (1983; 1986), Marie George (2001), Brian Hebblethwaite (2001; 2008, p. 74), Andrew Jaeger (2017), Fr. Roch Kereszty (2002, p. 382), Peter Kevern (2002), Eric Mascall (1965, pp. 40–41), Thomas Morris (1987, p. 183), Timothy Pawl (2016a; 2016b; 2019, chaps. 2 and 3), Robin Le Poidevin (2009, p. 183; 2011), Fr. Gerald O'Collins (2002, pp. 19–23), Fr. Joseph Pohle (1913, p. 136), Fr. Michael Schmaus (1971, pp. 241–42), Richard Sturch (1991, pp. 43, 194–200), and Keith Ward (1998, p. 162).

10 For a more detailed discussion of this text, as well as the argumentation that the real identity between the divine persons ought not to be conceptualized as strict identity, see Pawl (2020a, sec. 3.1)

11 See (Russell 2020, p. 343; Papadakis 1969). I thank Alexis Torrance for pointing me to the Russell translation.

12 I thank Jonathan Fuqua and Robert Koons for raising this objection.

13 See Spade (2008) for more on Universal Hylomorphism.

14 To reiterate, my response to this final objection – denying premise 3 – does not require taking a stand on whether or not all created natures have parts. That said, given that the conditionals in this argument are all material conditionals, my response *does* require me to accept the truth of premise 2. For a material conditional is false just in case the antecedent is true and the consequent is false. Thus, my denying premise 3 requires that I accept the truth of its antecedent. But its antecedent is the consequent of premise 2. So, given that I accept the truth of the antecedent of 3, and that that antecedent is the very same proposition as the consequent of 2, I must accept the truth of the consequent of premise 2. And from this it follows that, given my denial of premise 3, premise 2 cannot meet the conditions for falsity of a material conditional that I present in this footnote. Thus, if I deny 3, I must accept 2. If we understood the connectives in the premises differently – say, strict entailment or universalized quantificational claims or Aristotelian universal premises – then the denial of 3, all by itself, would not require the acceptance of 2. This, though, wouldn't be a problem for my response to this argument, since a single false premise is sufficient for the unsoundness of the objection, and I have shown that premise 3 is false, whatever that implies (or not) about the truth (or falsity) of premise 2.

15

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17 Classical Theists Are Committed to the Palamite Essence-Energies Distinction (Or, How to Make Sense of the Fact That God Does Not Intrinsically Differ Even Though He Can Do Otherwise)

James Rooney

Whether there exists a distinction between God's essence and God's energies is a question that is often taken to divide Eastern and Western, Orthodox and (Latin) Catholic, theology. The distinction is often called the "Palamite" doctrine, after the famous defender of the distinction, Gregory Palamas. Nevertheless, reference to God's essence and energies is scattered throughout the Greek Fathers. As I present it here, the Palamite distinction involves claiming that God can be characterized in regard to His essence and energies/activities, where both of these characterizations are equally "uncreated." However, a classical view found in Thomas Aquinas and the Latin tradition more generally holds that no properties really inhere in God, because God enters into no composition of any kind, including the composition of substance and accident. The Palamite distinction appears to make God's energies/activities akin to properties inhering in God, being somehow metaphysically distinct from Him or His essence. This has led many classical theists of the Latin tradition to reject the Palamite distinction as compromising divine simplicity. I will argue that it is, contrary to appearances, commitment to a "classical" view of divine simplicity that plausibly entails the Palamite distinction.

I am not here interested in giving a historical interpretation of the doctrine, and I will not therefore spend much time arguing that my interpretation of the distinction is the "right" way to interpret any of those authors. Yet I should note the vast historical baggage surrounding this Palamite distinction. Gregory is popularly revered by Eastern Catholic faithful and theologians, but the distinction between God's essence and energies is not commonly employed by most Latin Catholic theologians. A popular story is that this fact points to

an underlying theological difference between Orthodoxy and Catholicism: the Palamite distinction is the only reason for us to accept that humans can be "deified" through participation in God's energies,[1] whereas Catholics, through over-reliance on scholastic theology that insists on divine simplicity, have forsaken any real union with God.[2] The history here is far more intensely complicated and the popular story is a caricature. There have been Orthodox or Byzantine Catholic Thomist theologians in the past who accepted the distinction, even though it is true that there were many outspoken Thomists who attacked the Palamite distinction at the time of the failed reunion Council of Florence.[3] Notwithstanding, the distinction still frequently operates as a bogeyman against Orthodox/Catholic reunion. What I hope to show is that Latin scholasticism on the Catholic side, of the Thomist variety, is as committed to the distinction as the Orthodox.

Because it seems to me that there are as many versions of the Palamite distinction as interpreters, and I aim at analyzing the systematic issues of whether the distinction is *coherent* and *truly said of God*, I will use merely two short texts of Palamas as a starting point. I am not claiming to offer a scholarly analysis of the text. My reason for selecting these texts is that they should be immensely puzzling if the dominant narrative is correct in holding that the Palamite distinction is intrinsically opposed to classical theories of divine simplicity. In these passages, Palamas proposes or assumes divine simplicity of the classical sort within a few lines of proposing the essence/energies distinction. If divine simplicity of the classical sort and Palamism are incompatible, this fact should strike us as deeply puzzling or incomprehensible. What follows is then my attempt, starting from a Thomistic (classical) account of divine simplicity, to reason toward something that looks very much like what Palamas is proposing in this passage. While I will argue that a Thomist is committed to the Palamite distinction as I present it, I will leave it otherwise an open question whether my distinction is the "real" Palamite distinction.

17.1 Palamas's Distinction

The Palamite distinction is not only the claim that there is a distinction between God and His activities, as everyone will admit there is *some* distinction between what God is and what He does. A first clarification of what is distinctive about the Palamite distinction is that Gregory proposes that the essence and energies of God are equally "uncreated." Obviously, the divine energies are not *creatures* distinctly caused to exist by God and are instead as uncreated as God's essence. But I will begin with this claim and show that the core idea of the Palamite doctrine is that God's energies are as *equally fundamental* to God as His essence, in the sense that God cannot be adequately described without appealing to both His essence and energies.

Initially, to avoid a false start, it needs to be noted that Gregory explicitly subscribes to the view that God has no properties or accidents. In the following passage from his *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* (as collected in the *Philokalia*), Palamas explicitly professes what seems like the classical view of divine simplicity: "An accident is that which comes into existence and passes out of existence, and in this way we can conceive of inseparable attributes as well … But there is no such thing in God because He remains entirely changeless. For this reason nothing can be attributed to Him that is an accident."[4] Gregory rules out that God has either "separable" or "inseparable" accidents, which roughly correspond to "accidental" and "essential" intrinsic properties in contemporary metaphysics. Gregory's argument as to why this is the case is unimportant. What is germane is that Gregory thinks any intrinsic property or accident is ruled out by divine simplicity. Finally, Palamas explicitly notes that "the divine energy in God … is not essence, nor an accident … ."[5]

Palamas might be mistaken as to whether his doctrine entails the denial of a classical doctrine of divine simplicity, but the Palamite distinction is clearly *intended* to be compatible with that classical divine simplicity and we should interpret it charitably as such.[6] The distinction is nevertheless *prima facie* hard to square with simplicity. So how does Gregory do it? Gregory proposes explicit considerations as to why the divine energies are not accidents in God. Interestingly, the context is that Gregory is responding to an objection that, given divine simplicity, there are different Gods in different possible worlds where God acts differently (this is a problem I return to later). If God acts differently in different possible worlds, God acquires a different intrinsic property in each of those worlds (e.g., "Creator of the Universe" versus "Never Created") and so appears to differ in these different possible scenarios.

Gregory's response is that there is a problem with how the objector understands God's actions. Rather than energies being properties or accidents inhering in God's essence, Gregory thinks divine energies/activities are what account for relational predications (like causal relations) being true of God:

> … not everything predicated of God is said with regard to His essence; it can be said relatively, that is, with relation to something that is not God's essence. For example, the Father is spoken of in relation to the Son, for the Son is not the Father. And God is called Lord in relation to the subject creation, for God is Lord over beings that are in time and in the eternal age, and also Lord over the ages themselves. But this dominion is an uncreated energy of God, distinct from His essence in that it is said in relation to something else, something which He Himself is not.
>
> (Gregory Palamas, 1999, #125)

We see that Gregory here holds clearly that God's dominion over creation is as "uncreated" as God's essence. But what is the relational nature of energies doing here? Obviously, it is not the case that God is essentially the Creator of the universe; otherwise, God would differ when He does not create. So, the material universe—what God causes—does not seem identical to the uncreated divine energy ("dominion") by which God is Lord of creation.

And it is clear too that God's essence is distinct from His ability or power to act as Lord and Master of creation, from the analogy to the Trinitarian Persons. "Father" and "son" are correlative relational terms, so that fathers don't exist without sons and vice-versa, even though these relational terms indicate nothing about the essence of those fathers or sons (e.g., human or divine or animal father-son pairs). Thus, the personal names "the Father" and "the Son" name distinct relations, but both relations can characterize one God (so that Father and Son are one in essence). Gregory concludes his response to the objector by noting that divine energies involve a relational term being predicated of God and, for the same reason as in the case of Trinitarian relations, the divine energies do not violate divine simplicity: "Yet not all things said of God betoken His essence. For what belongs to the category of relation is also predicated of Him, and this is relative and refers to the relationship with something else, and does not signify essence. Such is the divine energy in God" (Gregory Palamas, 1999, #125).

Gregory's response might appear to trade one problem for another. If we avoid problems with energies violating divine simplicity because energies are not properties/accidents inhering in God, but relational beings instead (a view not shared by Aquinas, for whom relations are accidents if not subsistent, as the Trinitarian Persons are), how could it be the case that God's relations to created entities are equally fundamental to God's being as His essence? It would seem that a relation of this sort has the relata essentially, which would make created entities essential to being a divine energy. For example, if God is Lord because He has a relation to creation, how can this relation be uncreated if one of the relata of that relation is created? The universe need not have existed, and it was created in time, whereas God is outside of time. How is God having a relation of "Lord of creation" an uncreated energy of God, as fundamental to God's nature as, e.g., being goodness itself, especially if God could have chosen never to create? At this point, I turn to how Thomas Aquinas deals with this problem and will show that his solution implies a similar distinction as that of Palamas.

17.2 Thomas Aquinas

Fortuitously, Thomas Aquinas discusses exactly the same case that Gregory does: God's dominion over creation. Aquinas similarly explains

God's relation to creation as a relational fact about God that does not require a distinct property inhering in God's essence. Initially, however, Aquinas' explanation seems to diverge from that of Palamas because Aquinas calls this relation of God to creation a "mere being of reason":

> A man is really (and not merely conceptually) identical to himself, even though his relation [of self-identity] is a being of reason. And the explanation for this is that the cause of his relation is real—namely, the unity of his substance, which our intellect considers under the aspect of a relation. In the same way, the power to compel subjects is really in God, and our intellect considers this power as ordered to the subjects because of the subjects' order to God. It is for this reason that he is really said to be Lord, even though his relation is a mere being of reason. And for the same reason it is evident that he would be Lord [Creator, etc.] even if there were no created intellect in existence.[7]

Aquinas is proposing that relations of God to the world are relevantly like relations of self-identity. As my relation to myself carries no ontological cost, viz., no separate relational accident that grounds my self-identity, so too God being Lord over creation involves no real relational accident in God. Neither are "real" relations. Rather, the relations that exist in cases of self-identity are "mere beings of reason." Similarly, Aquinas claims, God's creation of the universe only involves an extrinsic relational change, like the relations involved in Cambridge changes. (Aquinas elsewhere more clearly explains that he means God has a purely logical relation to changes in creation.[8])

At first glance, Aquinas and Palamas appear to analyze the same case very differently. For Palamas, God's relation to creation is an uncreated energy, equally fundamental with the divine essence. By contrast, Aquinas thinks that the relation of God to creation is a "being of reason." In fact, however, that contrast is not accurate. Palamas, to begin with, does not obviously identify the *relation* of God to creation as what is uncreated (which would concede the objection he is refuting), but rather speaks of God's "dominion" over creation as uncreated. It seems reasonable to interpret Palamas as meaning: there is some real aspect of God in virtue of which it is true that creatures depend on Him (i.e., God's power or energy), even though the contingent relation holding between God and His creatures is not an intrinsic property in God. Otherwise, either God necessarily creates or God changes in virtue of creating the world—neither of which would be accepted by Palamas.

In fact, on further examination, Aquinas has a similar approach to the issue. Aquinas claims the relation of God to creation—the causal *relation* itself—is a being of reason, but he claims that the "cause of the relation" as existing *in* God is what permits us to predicate the relation of "being

creator" to God: "in cases involving relations of reason—such as self-identity or God's relation to the world—the *relata* are related, not by their relations (since these are mere beings of reason and hence dependent on the activity of the mind), but by what he refers to here as the *cause of* their relations." (Brower 2018, sec. 5.2) Thus, God has the power to cause creation to exist, even though God creating the universe does not imply any change in God (and so no accident/property of any kind), and God's power is that which accounts for the relation between God and the world. The fact that there is one and the same causal basis for these logical relations (namely, God's power) is what grounds the truth in virtue of which all God's relations are predicable of one and the same thing. This is why we can predicate, for Aquinas, many causal relations in regard to one and the same power in God (e.g., "God created the trees and the bees").

17.3 Essence ≠ Energies?

At this point, Aquinas and Palamas are in agreement that God's energies or power are not real intrinsic properties of God but are the cause of the relations that He brings about in causing created entities. Nevertheless, Palamas claims that there is a special distinction here between God's essence and His energies, such that God's essence is not identical to His energies. The energies of God are as "uncreated" as God's essence. Further, despite Palamas' claim above that God's energies are relational, Palamas (1983, pp. 93–6) clearly rejects the intimation that God's energies could be temporal or contingent. And the way Palamas employs the distinction indicates that this distinction is supposed to be a *fundamental* distinction in the way we predicate terms of God.[9] I will not directly give an exposition of Palamas on these points, but instead turn to show the way in which a problem that besets an underexplored aspect of Thomistic thought about the divine attributes, a controversy about God's freedom to act otherwise than He does, clarifies why we might want to posit the Palamite distinction even on the Thomistic model. In short, the Thomist should believe the same thing that Palamas does about the necessity of distinguishing divine power and action.

There would be problems if we understood the Palamite distinction, in the Thomistic sense, to be a real distinction in God. A "real" distinction is one, Aquinas says, where the relation is intrinsic but is essentially "toward" another. The Persons of God are real subsistent relations, because the Father is related essentially to the Son according to the appropriate relation of origin, and vice-versa. The Father is not a Father without the Son. But if the distinction between God's essence and energies were "real" in this sense, the energies of God would either constitute a distinct supposit or person in God (a fourth Person of the Trinity), because God was necessarily related to Himself in some way; or

God would create of necessity because God was necessarily related to something outside of Himself, i.e., a creature. Both of these alternatives would be straightforwardly heretical. For this reason, if there is a distinction between God's essence and His energies, that distinction must be what Thomas calls a logical one. The way I have set up the distinction thus far gives us an easy heuristic for such a distinction: God Himself is the x that makes it true that p (the one *truthmaker*) for each set of predications about God's nature and His activity. The distinctions we make between these divine names (including that between God's essence and energies) are on the side of our concepts or predications, rather than being intrinsic to God.

Failing to apply the Thomistic term "real" to the Palamite distinction does not mean the distinction is not well-grounded or not fundamental—or even that it would be unreasonable to refer to the distinction as "real" in some contexts. For example, the distinction need not be merely logical, in the sense of being merely a distinction without a difference, as might be the case in referring to Cicero as "Tully." What is being denied here is a metaphysical distinction in God's being. While a metaphysical distinction may not exist such that God has relational accidents, I will propose that the importance of the Palamite distinction lies in the critical role that it plays in a fully developed account of God's nature; not every logical distinction is interchangeable or plays the same theoretical role. Some distinctions in God's nature may be non-fundamental logical distinctions, such as a distinction between God's providence and His power, whereas others, like the Palamite distinction, point to fundamental ways that we divide the divine names.

Why we might need a distinction of fundamentality in names of God is made clear when we consider a controverted problem in contemporary philosophy of religion. For a classical theist, God is simple such that God has no parts or accidents. God's action, essence, and power are all identical. This raises a serious worry: God is supposed to be a free agent, who can do otherwise than He does. But God's essence is immutable and unchangeable. If God's action is identical to His essence, divine simplicity seems to entail that God acts necessarily rather than freely, contradicting the claim that God is free.[10]

One solution to this problem in contemporary literature was proposed by Kretzmann and Stump. After distinguishing the ways that God wills certain things of necessity (e.g., His own goodness), they point out that Aquinas holds that God nevertheless does not choose everything of necessity—in fact, God can do otherwise, having free choice. Failing to apply the Thomistic term "real" to the Palamite distinction does not mean the distinction is not well-grounded or not fundamental—or even that it would be unreasonable to refer to the distinction as 'real' in some contexts. For example, the distinction need not be merely logical, in the sense of being merely a distinction without a difference, as might be the

case in referring to "Cicero" as "Tully." What is being denied here is a metaphysical distinction in God's being. (Kretzmann and Stump, 1985, pp. 362–6) The choice to create is a paradigm case of God being free to do otherwise, but this does not conflict with the claim that God is changeless and immutable, existing outside of time. Indeed, God does not need to change in the actual world when He chooses to create—He can be such that, from eternity, He chooses to create. Nevertheless, Stump and Kretzmann claim that this does not mean God would be unchangeable across all possible worlds. In fact, "God is not the same in all possible worlds."[11] In sum, the Kretzmann-Stump solution to the problem is to, first, restrict divine immutability to a denial that God changes across time. Then, although God is determinate and immutable in each world, given what He has chosen to actually do, they admit that God differs across each possible world, depending on what He does in each possible world.[12]

We can turn to the Yogācāra Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti to bring out a serious difficulty for Kretzmann and Stump's proposal. One of Dharmakīrti's objections to the existence of a creator God, as posited by some Indian philosophers, hinged on God having a *potential* to create.[13] Hayes (1988, p. 13) reconstructs the premise of the argument as follows: "if God is a creator of the universe, it must be admitted that he has a potential to create that exists prior to his actually creating anything. But if this is so, we must ask how that potential becomes realized." And if the theist proposes nothing outside of God that actualizes God's potential to act, then God Himself does so. This generates a contradiction, however, as God cannot be immutable; "But if God performs an action, then he must undergo change and thus cannot be permanent" (Hayes 1988, p. 13).

Dharmakīrti's conclusion is then that "a permanent, unchanging entity such as God would have to have exactly the same nature before the creation of the world as after; there would be no difference whatsoever between God as creator and God as a being that is not yet a creator." (Hayes 1988, p. 12) Dharmakīrti uses temporal language and seems to presume that God is acting at some definite time, but his point could nevertheless be adapted to remove the temporal references: God would, as a result of choosing to create, be different, and this would seem to conflict with the claim that God is not such that He could be different. Aquinas' God, who is pure actuality or *esse*, has no passive potentiality in virtue of which He could be different.[14] In addition, the point can be made even without adverting to a claim about God's potentiality (Kretzmann and Stump agree that God has no potentiality). In his *De Ente et Essentia,* Aquinas argues that there can exist precisely *one* being, at most, whose essence is identical with its existence—God—because there would be nothing to differentiate one being of such a sort from another.

After giving some ways we differentiate things, Aquinas proposes that "if we posit a thing which is existence alone, such that this existence is subsistent, this existence will not receive the addition of a difference because it would no longer be existence alone, but existence plus some form. And much less will it receive the addition of matter because it would no longer be a subsistent existence, but a material existence. Whence it remains that such a thing, which is its own existence, cannot be but one."[15] If Kretzmann and Stump's proposal that God's nature is such that it differs in virtue of God's acting otherwise, even if they restrict that claim across possible worlds and not across time, then it is possible for there to be a formal difference in God's nature resulting from each God acting in distinct ways. But Aquinas' inference in *De Ente* would then be fallacious, as it would be possible for there to be more than one God, each differing in respect to their nature. For this reason, we can see that Aquinas holds instead that God *necessarily* does not differ in respect to His nature.

W. Matthews Grant (2004) criticizes Kretzmann and Stump's solution on much these same lines, instead proposing that the key to a solution lies in an Aristotelian maxim about causality, namely, that the "action of the agent is in the patient" and not in the agent.[16] Thus, "the apparent conflict between divine simplicity and divine freedom results precisely from thinking of creating the universe as if it were such an intrinsic property, a determinate act or aspect in God, whether accidental or substantial." (Grant 2004, p. 138) God's creation does not require that God acquire a new accidental property or being intrinsically and essentially different in worlds where He creates and worlds where He does not. To Dharmakīrti's point, then, being a cause does require some change when acting and when not. And there is such a difference in the state of affairs when God acts and when He does not, but those changes are entirely in what God causes and not in God's nature.

On one hand, Kretzmann and Stump might propose that Grant's solution is problematic because this is just what it means not to will of necessity: that God's choices could have been otherwise. But then it seems that God's nature is going to need to have contingent properties, such that in some worlds He is a Creator and others not, in order for His will to be free. On the other hand, Dharmakīrti would not likely accept Grant's Thomistic-Aristotelian claims about causality and might argue that we have no good grounds for believing a cause like God is metaphysically possible; if divine causation is supposed to be *sui generis* in being the only instance of causation exercised without intrinsic change in the agent, and we reason to the possibility of this divine causation from other cases of causation (as in a cosmological argument), then it looks like there might be grounds to question whether the inference to the existence of that kind of *sui generis* causation is question-begging. And we have grounds for this worry in Aquinas because, as Grant makes

clear, Aquinas *deduces* the manner in which God causes the universe from the doctrine of divine simplicity—because we have to deny accidents in God, we must deny that God's mode of creation involves any change in God's nature.[17] As a consequence, Grant's response shifts the problem elsewhere: if we accept that God is simple, and so that He must act in the way Grant has proposed, how is it true that God can do otherwise? Or, to elaborate on the question, *how* is it true *both* that God is simple and that God can do otherwise?

We can make the issue clearer by giving a variation on Grant's response that does not involve an appeal to the nature of causality. Tomaszewski (2019) has highlighted a modal fallacy affecting some contemporary arguments against divine simplicity which object that there is a "modal collapse." For example, the classical theist holds that God is identical with His attributes, such as His act of creating. But then, if God is necessary, and He is identical with His act of creation, God's act of creation is necessary. But, as Tomaszewski points out, "modal contexts are referentially opaque, which means that substitution into them does not generally preserve the truth of the sentence into which such a substitution has been made." (Tomaszewski 2019, p. 278) Just such a substitution is made in the argument that God creates necessarily, from the claim that God is necessary to the claim that His act is necessary.[18] (The same would apply to other instances of modal predication—for example, that God is necessary does not entail that it is necessary that God wills or knows *x*).

Dhamarkirti's objection does not strictly require the claim about the nature of causality as much as this apparently plausible intuition we might have about God's activities: God's action, if it is to refer to God, must be *intrinsic* to God as much as God's power to act. If we hold that divine immutability (*pace* Kretzmann and Stump) requires not only that God does not change across time, but also that God is identical in all possible worlds, then referring to God as the creator must do so in every possible world—i.e., rigidly. (Tomaszewski 2019, p. 280) But, as Dharmakīrti's point goes, we could not rigidly refer to the same God in worlds where He creates and where He does not, if God's acts are intrinsic to Him. Yet Tomaszewski shows what is wrong with that reasoning:

> While God's act is indeed intrinsic (and therefore identical) to Him, 'God's act of creation' designates that act, not how it is in itself, but by way of its contingent effects. That is, whether 'God's act of creation' designates God's act depends on the existence of a creation which is contingent, and so the designation is not rigid. And since the designation is not rigid, the identity statement is not necessary, as it must be in order to validate the argument from modal collapse. This is parallel to the way in which 'the Creator' designates God, not how He is in Himself, but rather by way of the contingent effects of His act.
>
> (Tomaszewski 2019, p. 280)

This answer is exactly what we found Aquinas himself explaining when he noted that, even though designating God, e.g., as Creator, is done by means of God's (contingent) effect, creation implies no "real relation" of God to His contingent effects.[19] "Real relation" is taken by Aquinas to mean that God does not acquire any intrinsic properties in virtue of bringing about His effects, so that God merely has a "logical" or external relation to what He creates. This would be to say, *pace* Kretzmann and Stump, that the properties relevant to God's freedom to act otherwise, e.g., as being Creator, are mere "Cambridge properties," not intrinsic accidents in God or His nature.[20]

Nevertheless, such a response needs to be expanded. Consider the general case where we say that God is *acting*, simpliciter. The latter kinds of predication do not involve a created term. Yet God is identical with His action; "God's action is not distinct from His power, for both are His divine essence … ."[21] To say that God is powerful or is acting, as Aquinas says, directly designates the divine substance.[22] Yet predications concerning God's power and His activity involve *relations* of God to other things—insofar as the divine nature is capable of or actually producing a given effect. It is necessary, for instance, that God has the power to create a universe distinct from Himself. These claims make it *appear* as if God has unactualized potential given the powers He is not manifesting, or effects He is not currently producing.

What is required, to make sense of these predications on the classical model of divine simplicity is to separate the way we talk about God as acting and as powerful. When Aquinas discusses the way we designate God as being powerful, he notes that:

> In God the idea of power is retained, inasmuch as it is the principle of an effect; not, however, as it is a principle of action, for this is the divine essence itself; except, perchance, after our manner of understanding, inasmuch as the divine essence, which pre-contains in itself all perfection that exists in created things, can be understood either under the notion of action, or under that of power; as also it is understood under the notion of "suppositum" possessing nature, and under that of nature.[23]

God's power is never such that God has unactualized potential—for He is pure act—and so to say that God is powerful is to refer to God as being a principle by which many possible effects can be produced, not as something He ever "actualizes" in some cases and not in others.

Therefore, Aquinas says that God is powerful insofar as God is a principle of effects, but that the principle of God's action is the divine essence itself. But he then tentatively advances a proposal for making sense of a further distinction. Aquinas proposes that, even though God's power and action are really identical with God Himself,[24] we are

referring to God in two different respects or notions (*rationes*) when we say He acts and when we say God is powerful. After the manner of the way *we* refer to God, God's essence can be designated either under the notion of power or action, where God's nature is *powerful* and God as a concrete particular (supposit) is *acting*. In this way, then, God can be considered as both powerful and as acting.

Aquinas's appeal to the distinction between how we refer to God under the notion of both nature and supposit has received attention from Eleonore Stump, who argues that we ordinarily think of such predications as incompatible. To predicate something as a nature is to predicate abstractly ("Goodness"), whereas to predicate something as a supposit is to predicate concretely ("a good [thing]"). (Stump 2011, pp. 198–9) Ordinarily, no kind of thing is such as to be both an abstract universal and a concrete particular. Aquinas claims, however, that *neither* set of concrete or abstract predications is sufficient to capture the divine essence; rather, *both* must be used to name God truly.[25] Stump proposes that Aquinas is not enmeshed in contradiction but doing a sort of "quantum theology." Aquinas makes the claim that God belongs to no *genus* and that we have no grasp of God's quiddity or essence. When we recognize that God lies outside of the ordinary genera signified by our abstract terms, then the *way* we utilize these contrasting modes of predication is not contradictory when applied in such a case—the use of an abstract term for God does not rule out the possibility that we can predicate a particular term of God as well.[26]

The reason we need both sets of predications—abstract and concrete—is a fact about our manner of predication, not a fact about God. Nevertheless, this distinction between modes of predicating terms of God is what we would call a *fundamental* one, because it is ideologically, not metaphysically, fundamental.[27] As Aquinas' tentative proposal made clear, this distinction in modes of predication is precisely what is required to speak both of God's power and His action, without an ensuing modal collapse where God's actions become necessary and He cannot do otherwise. Even though God is such that His power, essence, and action are identical, important truths about God are lost in failing to draw the appropriate ideological distinctions between how God's essence accounts for the truths of various propositions about His activity and power.

While I have refrained from the textual interpretation of Palamas, it is important to note that Aquinas' proposal that there is a fundamental logical distinction between these ways of predicating that God is His act or His power has echoes explicitly in Palamas' *Triads*. Palamas accuses his opponents of heresy in holding that God's activities could be contingent, with temporal beginning or end, which would indicate that he cannot believe creation is an essential *relata* in the relational being of God's energies. (Gregory Palamas 1983, pp. 93–6) Further, Palamas

repeatedly proposes that God's essence "transcends" His power because those terms which signify God's power do not adequately signify His essence. What it is to be God is more than to be powerful; being God also involves, for example, being active. This is why Palamas insists we need to hold such a distinction between God's essence and His energies. (Gregory Palamas 1983, p. 95) Palamas is putting his finger on an important issue: a classical theist does not think that God is merely a will or, *contra* Plantinga's reading of divine simplicity (Plantinga 1980, p. 47), that God is an attribute. The Palamite distinction, then, between God's energies and His essence can be seen to be a fundamental one because it allows the classical theist to hold together various divine names that would be insufficient individually—God is neither His essential power nor His act, but both. In what follows, I will try to expand upon Aquinas's tentative proposal to show how the classical theist is committed to such a distinction between God's essence and energies in explaining two ways that God *makes true* various kinds of predications about Him.

17.4 The Proposal

The way I will fill in the details of Aquinas' tentative proposal builds on the "divine truthmaker simplicity" position defended separately by Timothy Pawl and Jeff Brower.[28] They employ the notion that God is a single truthmaker—an x which makes p true—for many propositions about God that appear to describe God's properties: e.g., God is wise, merciful, loving, etc. These predications, unlike propositions about God's causal acts, are made true solely in virtue of having God as their truthmaker. Pawl and Brower's position has received criticism.[29] Noël Saenz proposes this difficulty for the divine simplicity truthmaker theorist:

> ... why is it that the truth of one predication, that God is wise, depends on the truth of another, that God is divine, rather than the other way around? In short, why ["God is wise because God is divine"] rather than ["God is divine, at least in part, because God is wise"]? This question must have an answer. That one predication is true in virtue of another predication is not a fundamental fact. Predications, and their exemplifying a dependence order, are not brute, primitive, entities or facts. Perhaps there is nothing that explains why certain properties obtain in virtue of other properties, but predications are not properties.
>
> (Saenz 2014, p. 469)

My proposal is that the divine truthmaker theorist has a way to answer these criticisms by appealing to the Palamite distinction. The Palamite distinction, recall, is not a fundamental *metaphysical* distinction in

God that would make it true that some predications depend on another. Instead, the Palamite distinction is a fundamental *ideological* one, involving facts about how we predicate terms of God.

God is simple because He has no accidents in Him which could act as distinct truthmakers, and, in fact, God is such that we do not know *what* He is (we can express this metaphysically by saying that God belongs to no natural kind and has no *genus*). Despite these claims of classical theism, there are different ways in which God Himself acts as a truthmaker for different classes of propositions, given the fundamental distinction in ways we humans predicate terms of Him. An appeal to ideological fundamentality can help resolve Saenz's question why it might be true to say "God is wise because He is divine" but not "God is divine because He is wise." Both these terms refer to God's essence, or the divine nature, abstracted from relation to anything other than God (except potentially). Those terms, then, that are more intensionally *abstract* are those that are more fundamental when referring to God's nature, given the way that we lack access to the nature of God's perfections. Aquinas makes an argument along these lines that "being" (*esse*) is the primary name for referring to God's essence, because "being" is the most abstract term we can use to describe any nature.[30] While it would go beyond this paper to defend the claim, it seems plausible, on this explanation, that "divinity" refers more abstractly than "wisdom," explaining why we would hold that it is true to say "God is wise because He is divine," rather than the other way around.

We can go beyond Saenz's objection to see that the Palamite appeal to a distinction between essence and energies helps us in more than one way. Whereas terms like "divinity" and "wisdom" are abstract properties, both of which refer to God's essence directly, there are other terms that do so indirectly because they are relational terms, such as "Creator." To say that God is "Creator" or "First Efficient Cause" are relational terms does not mean that they tell us nothing about what God is in Himself. Even though relational terms do not function like predicating an intrinsic property of God, these relational terms refer to God by way of His relations to other things. For example, when we learn that God actually functions as a concrete agent, causing the universe, we can reason to facts about God's power. But facts about God as powerful—e.g., that He can perform a miracle—are distinct from what He actually does.[31]

God, a single truthmaker, makes true both kinds of propositions. The distinction between God's essence and God's energies explains two things. First, it explains why truths about God's activities depend on God's essence, despite God being a single truthmaker for both truths. Given human conceptual divisions, *agents* perform actions. Consequently, claims about activity depend on agents. This is the case even when, in God, God is identical with His action and so there is no

fundamental metaphysical distinction between God's act and His essence. The dependence hierarchy among the divine names is a feature of ideology, not metaphysics. Second, the distinction explains why we cannot merely refer to one set of divine names, and so why there is an order of dependence among divine names. This requires a "re-duplication" of certain sets of divine names across various categories of terms, between relational and non-relational terms, as well as between concrete and abstract terms. It would be false to think that God is an abstraction because He is a *concrete* or particular being, but it would be as erroneous to think that God is merely a being like any other. Aquinas' quasi-definition or characterization of God as *"esse ipsum subsistens,"* therefore, includes not only predicating *esse* of God (an abstract term) but also that God is *subsistens* (a concrete term). In the same way, it would be erroneous to speak of God as acting without saying that He is powerful.[32]

Thomists are among those classical theists who are self-consciously committed to the claim that God has no accidents. But, given that view of divine simplicity and the view that God has free will to act other than He does, the Thomist then needs to say it is true that God can do otherwise, even though He is identical with His action. It seems to me that Aquinas' own solution on this point, even as a tentative proposal, is best interpreted as leading to the embrace of the Palamite distinction.[33] For this reason, it seems that the Palamite and the Thomist are committed to exactly the same doctrine of God, although they have arrived at similar conclusions through different routes.[34] If my account is coherent and faithful to the classical theistic Latin tradition as well, my reading of the Palamite distinction would be valuable in reconciling two prominent intellectual traditions in Catholicism and Orthodoxy.[35]

More generally, my argument illustrates why the classical theist should not only find my distinction between God's essence and energies plausible but should be *committed* to that distinction. The reason is that the classical theist should be able to give an explanation for the semantics of the divine names without appeal to *any* metaphysical distinction intrinsic to the divine nature. The Palamite distinction accounts for ideologically fundamental divisions among the divine names, explaining the way in which they depend on each other even, even while affirming classical divine simplicity and so without positing any such metaphysical distinction in God Himself. I have not advanced any detailed textual support for my interpretation of the Palamite distinction in the corpus of Palamas' texts, but, as I have indicated, there are good reasons to believe this reading is faithful to his thought.[36] Even if my proposal were not faithful to Palamas, the proposal is independently defensible and at least illustrates that we have not adequately explored either classical accounts of divine simplicity or that of Gregory Palamas.[37,38]

Notes

1 There is a further claim I will not explore here: that, while God's essence is unknowable, human beings can, through grace, participate in the divine energies and become like God (i.e., "deified"). It seems to me if we make sense of the primary distinction I deal with in this paper, the solution to this second question should be fairly obvious.

2 The contrast is highlighted much more frequently by educated Orthodox priests or believers rather than Catholics; for an example, "By the fourteenth century, the Roman Church generally rejected the teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas about God's grace being the uncreated energies of God. … The scholastic theology of the West had adopted a new speculative and philosophical approach that pursued the knowledge of God through reasoning rather than the way of knowing that comes from the experience and revelation of God. The West adopted Aristotelian logic and lost the patristic distinction between the essence and energies of God; something that has primarily persisted to this day" (Ancient Faith Ministries, 2016).

3 Marcus Plested presents a clear and immensely helpful history of the reception of Thomas Aquinas's thought among Greek theologians. He also notes that a prominent Greek theologian, Gregorios Scholasticos, interpreted the essence/energies distinction in line with Scotus' formal distinction, much as Spencer (2017) proposes to do. See (Plested 2012).

4 Gregory Palamas, 1999, #127.

5 Gregory Palamas, 1999, #127.

6 Marcus Plested (2019) has recently compiled, from a series of Gregory's other writings, a veritable *florilegium* of how Gregory explicitly defends divine simplicity in the strong and classical sense, in addition to his repeated claims that the Palamite distinction follows from divine simplicity properly understood.

7 Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 11, ad 3–5. Translation in Brower 2018.

8 Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter, ST], 1920, I, 1. 13, a. 7, resp.: "there is nothing to prevent these names which import relation to the creature from being predicated of God temporally, not by reason of any change in Him, but by reason of the change of the creature; as a column is on the right of an animal, without change in itself, but by change in the animal."

9 Gregory Palamas 1983, pp. 92–93: "I should like to ask [Barlaam of Calabria] why he claims that only the divine essence is without beginning, whereas everything apart from it is of a created nature, and whether or not he thinks this essence is all-powerful. That is to say, does it possess the faculties of knowing, of prescience, of creating, of embracing all things in itself; does it possess providence, the power of deification and, in a word, all such faculties, or not? For if it does not have them, this essence is not God, even though it alone is unoriginate. If it does possess these powers, but acquired them subsequently, then there was a time when it was imperfect, in other words, was not God. However, if it possessed these faculties from eternity, it follows that not only is the divine essence unoriginate, but that each of its powers is also. Nonetheless, there is only one unoriginate essence, the essence of God; none of the powers that inhere in it is an essence, so that all necessarily and always are in the divine essence. To use an obscure image, they exist in the divine essence as do the powers of the senses in what is called the common spiritual sense of the soul. Here is the manifest, sure and recognised teaching of the Church!"

10 This problem is well-known in the Thomistic tradition. The following are some significant sources in the history of the problem, as documented by Fr. Peter Totelben in his *The Palamite Controversy: A Thomistic Analysis* (2015, p. 90, fn. 214). The Salmanticenses (1876, vol. 2, tract. 4, disp. 7, dub. 1, p. 101) claimed "the explanation of the quiddity of the free acts of God is of the highest difficulty, and thus many of the most weighty doctors teach that it is not possible to have an understanding of it in this life; it is reserved for heaven." The eighteenth century Dominican Charles-René Billuart agreed: "This knot is the most intricate sacred enigma of all of theology, of which the human mind is unequal to completely solving … Behold the highest difficulty which even theologians of the most exceeding genius twist and are compelled to go off into various opinions." (Billuart 1747, vol. 1, diss. 7, a. 4, p. 245). A summary of the relevant texts of Aquinas is given in Wippel 2007, pp. 218–39. Classical Thomistic treatments of this problem can also be found in (John of St. Thomas 1937, disp. 24, aa. 3–7, pp. 76–136; Billuart 1747, vol. 1, diss. 7, aa. 2–4, pp. 256–66; Salmanticenses 1876, tract iv, disp. iii–viii, vol. 2, pp. 35–137; Garrigou-Lagrange 1949, vol. 2, pp. 351–4).

11 Kretzmann and Stump, 1985, p. 369. The same position is defended in Stump's later 2005, pp. 109–115.

12 Kretzmann and Stump, 1985, p. 369: "[Aquinas] does not conceive of contingency in terms of differences across possible worlds generally but, rather, in terms of branching time-lines emanating from a single possible initial world-state. And so we propose taking Thomas's 'essential', 'necessary', 'accidental', and 'contingent' to refer to modalities that can be determined by inspecting some subset of possible worlds consisting of the branching time-lines emanating from a single possible initial world-state-an initial-state set, we will call it. […] Within any initial-state set of possible worlds God's nature is fully and immutably determinate, and it is so as a consequence of the single, timeless act of will in which God wills goodness (himself) and whatever else (if anything) he wills for the sake of goodness in that initial-state set."

13 Dharmakīrti's actual argument is in verse, which makes a reconstruction helpful. The key passage that begins his argument in the *Pramdnavdrttika* is: "How, if an entity is a cause, / (But is said) sometimes to be / A non-cause, can one assert in any way / That a cause is a non-cause? / One cannot so assert." Translation from Jackson 1986, p. 330.

14 Aquinas rejects the use of terms that indicate distinctions or differences in the Godhead, except in a highly qualified sense when applied to Persons of the Trinity; ST I, q. 31, a. 3, esp. ad. 2.

15 Thomas Aquinas 1933, *De Ente et Essentia,* cap. 3: "Si autem ponatur aliqua res, quae sit esse tantum, ita ut ipsum esse sit subsistens, hoc esse non recipiet additionem differentiae, quia iam non esset esse tantum, sed esse et praeter hoc forma aliqua; et multo minus reciperet additionem materiae, quia iam esset esse non subsistens sed materiale. Unde relinquitur quod talis res, quae sit suum esse, non potest esse nisi una."

16 As Grant documents (Grant 2004, p. 139, fn. 43), Aquinas explicitly accepts this maxim and applies it to God's creation; Cf. Thomas Aquinas 1920, ST I–II, q. 110, a. 2: "Motion is the act of the mover in the moved." Cf. ST I, q. 18, a. 3 ad. 1: "Because movement is an act of the thing in movement, the latter action, in so far as it is the act of the operator, is called its movement, by this similitude, that as movement is an act of the thing moved, so an act of this kind is the act of the agent." C.f., Thomas Aquinas 1950, *In XI Metaphysica*, lectio 9, nos. 2309–2313.

17 Grant 2004, p. 137: "Aquinas's teaching on God's relationship to creatures is motivated by the same kind of reasoning that leads to the doctrine of divine simplicity in the first place—indeed, that it is a corollary of that doctrine."

18 Aquinas invokes this distinction in his discussion of whether God's acts are necessary, accusing the objector of just such a modal fallacy both in thinking that God wills what He does necessarily and in holding that God's will imposes necessity on what is willed: ST I, q. 19, a. 3 & a. 8.

19 C.f., ST I, 1. 13, a. 7.

20 See, for example, Francescotti 1999.

21 ST I, q. 25, a. 1, ad. 2.

22 ST I, q. 13, a. 7, ad. 1: "Some relative names are imposed to signify the relative habitudes themselves … But others are imposed to signify the things from which ensue certain habitudes … . Thus, there is the same two-fold difference in divine names. For some signify the habitude itself to the creature, as "Lord," and these do not signify the divine substance directly, but indirectly, in so far as they presuppose the divine substance; as dominion presupposes power, which is the divine substance. Others signify the divine essence directly, and consequently the corresponding habitudes, as "Savior," "Creator," and suchlike; and these signify the action of God, which is His essence. Yet both names are said of God temporarily so far as they imply a habitude either principally or consequently, but not as signifying the essence, either directly or indirectly."

23 ST I, q. 25, a. 1, ad 3.

24 Elsewhere the identification is clear: e.g., Thomas Aquinas 1975, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, c. 8: "For things identical with one and the same thing are identical with one another. But God's power is His substance, as was just proved. And His action is His substance … for the same argument applies to His other operations. Therefore, in God power is not distinct from action." [Quae enim uni et eidem sunt eadem, sibi invicem sunt eadem. Divina autem potentia est eius substantia, ut ostensum est. Eius etiam actio est eius substantia, ut in primo libro ostensum est de intellectuali operatione: eadem enim ratio in aliis competit. Igitur in Deo non est aliud potentia et aliud actio.]

25 C.f., ST I, q. 13, a. 1, ad. 2 & q. 13, a. 9, ad. 2.

26 Stump 2011, pp. 200–203. In these cases, both concrete and abstract terms have the same referent, God.

27 More can be said here about how such a distinction is ideologically fundamental, but I am appealing to a distinction found in contemporary metaphysics. C.f., Sider 2011, pp. 1–8; see also, Finocchiaro 2019.

28 See most recently, Pawl 2019. Their position is defended in a number of places: Brower 2008a; Brower 2008b; Pawl 2012; 2016a; 2016b.

29 Saenz 2014.

30 See Rooney 2017.

31 The explanation of this paragraph is mirrored in that given by Aquinas 1975, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, caput 13–14.

32 Gilles Emery explains Thomas's account of "reduplication" or *redoublement,* when it concerns the Trinitarian relations in (Emery 2003, pp. 172–185). While the Trinitarian relations are "real" relations, unlike these other relational divine names, the ordinary cases of relational terms (referring to God's energies) and the way that they relate to non-relational names that refer to God's essence are, in my view, an analogy for understanding Aquinas' account of the Trinitarian relations. One sees my point, for example, about dependence in divine names applied to the Trinity in, e.g., *ST* I, q. 40, a. 4,

resp.: "we must absolutely say that the relations in our mode of understanding follow upon the notional acts, so that we can say, without qualifying the phrase, that 'because He begets, He is the Father.'"

33 Joseph Lenow (2019) has proposed a view of divine simplicity that comes strikingly close to my own proposal. It is also noteworthy that my proposal would involve a particular way to understand the classical scholastic claim that divine actions *ad extra* are "virtually transitive." Compare what Garrigou-Lagrange says about these relations: "The doctrine of St. Thomas and his disciples is very clear on this point. They teach in common that even God's action ad extra is formally immanent and virtually transitive, and that there is no real relation on God's part toward us; there is only a relation of dependence of the creature on God, and this is not reciprocated. Thus the creative action is formally immanent and eternal, although it produces, at the time willed in advance by God, an effect in time. Whereas the formally transitive action, such as the heating of water by the coal fire, is an accident that proceeds from the agent and terminates in the patient, the divine action ad extra cannot be an accident; it is really identical with God's very essence. It is therefore formally immanent, and, though not having the imperfections of the formally transitive action, it resembles this latter in so far as it produces either a spiritual or corporeal effect that is really distinct from it. It is in this sense that it is said to be virtually transitive, for it contains eminently within itself all the perfection of a formally transitive action, without any of the imperfections that essentially belong to this latter," in Garrigou-Lagrange 1949, pp. 252–253.

34 See (Spencer 2017) for a variant, more detailed interpretation of the semantics involved in the Palamite distinction. His interpretation of Palamite semantics appears largely compatible with the analysis of the metaphysics of the distinction I offer here. That said, while I cannot explore this here, the Thomistic proposal is not the same as the Scotist 'formal distinction' that Spencer endorses. In sum, the Thomist appeals to less ideological machinery. The Scotist formal distinction requires a difference between forms, formalities, and intelligibilities that goes beyond the commitments that I have taken on here and differs in obvious ways from the way in which Aquinas had proposed a distinction in how different terms refer to God.

35 Even so, there are further questions I do not treat here as to what *exactly* is doctrinally binding on Orthodox Christians as a result of the hesychast councils of Constantinople. Usually, in theological tradition, the Church does not endorse as binding the entire system of any particular theologian and even when they endorse a claim or formulation from (for example) Scotus, the Church does not require subscribing to that theologian's particular explanation of it. Consequently, it is possible that my proposal does not match all elements of Palamas' own exposition but could nevertheless justify enough of a distinction that it allows one to subscribe entirely to the declarations of the councils or the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*.

36 I note in particular that it seems to me, if I am correct, that many interpreters of the Palamite distinction, such as Mark of Ephesus, Vladimir Lossky, and John Meyendorff, have failed to capture important nuances of the doctrine. By contrast, even though Demetracopoulos believes Palamas himself was committed to a "real distinction," (which I have already suggested is not obvious) he shows that many early followers of Palamas, i.e., "Neo-Palamites," were in favor of a way of understanding Palamas' claims in a way that is similar to what I have presented, avoiding positing any real distinctions or formal distinctions in God.

See Demetracopoulos 2011, pp. 263–372. Recently, however, David Bradshaw (2019) has defended a position much like mine here—pushing back against Demetracopoulos' and others' quick identification of Palamas's distinction as a "real" one.

37 For further defense of the general reading I have given of Gregory Palamas, making Palamas sympathetic to the classical approach to divine simplicity, see the extended treatment by Plested 2012.

38 Many thanks to those whose comments led to improvements of this paper, including Ryan Miller and Fr. Christiaan Kappes.

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